THE LIVING GOD

A Devotional Study

V. F. STORR

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The Living God

THE LIVING GOD

BY

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CANON OF WESTMINSTER

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Foreword

A Book for Lenten reading must always be a publication of importance. It will be in the hands of those who determinedly wish to read wisely and receptively. It matters therefore greatly what it says. This book will, I am quite certain, fulfil admirably its simple purpose. Its author is one who has secured the confidence of a large circle of listeners and readers, and the confidence is well deserved. Few of those who study its pages will fail to find therein what is fresh as well as forcible, and I commend it with all my heart to men and women who are ready at such a time to digest as well as read the thoughts of a teacher whose sane and reasonable guidance is based upon wide knowledge and fervent faith.

RANDALL CANTUAR.

Lambeth,
Epiphany, 1925.

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Chapter I *The Existence of God*

Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and for that he is strong in power, not one is lacking.—

ISAIAH xl. 26.

He hath made everything beautiful in his time: also he hath set eternity in their heart.—ECCLESIASTES iii. 11 (R. V. Margin).

MOST men will not want to spend time arguing about the existence of God. They are satisfied that this marvellous universe did not make itself or come into being by chance, but is the work of a Creative Mind. They are aware, too, of spiritual instincts and impulses within themselves which point to God as their source and goal. "He hath set eternity in their hearts" is the confession which rises naturally to our lips when we reflect upon personality with its ideals and aspirations. Mankind, taken as a whole, is incurably religious.

History shows no example of a tribe or nation which had no belief in a Supreme Being, or in some powers superior to man upon whom in various ways he is dependent.

But history also shows how very varied are the thoughts about God which have been held in the past and are still held to-day. Even where belief in One God obtains, that belief ranges all the way from the Christian faith of a man like St. Paul to the vague faith of the savage in some Great Spirit who haunts his life in mysterious fashion. Some have given the name God to a blind, unconscious force; others have called the universe God. And within the circle of Christian theology itself thoughts about God have differed greatly. We cannot assume that when two Christians speak of God they mean by the term precisely the same thing. For the one there may be no real experience of God in his life; the word for him has a hollow sound, and signifies little in his every day living. For the other it comes charged with rich spiritual associations of love and providence and friendship and forgiveness. The idea of God, therefore, must be tested and

criticized. All our knowledge reacts upon our thought of God, so that our conception of Him is ever growing. It changes with the changing outlook of the centuries; and if we would keep our thought of God fresh and living, we must see to it that we are ready to make room within our theology for the new truth which God is perpetually revealing. As someone has remarked, more important than the question, Is there a God? is the question, What is your view of the nature of God? God is the supreme fact of existence, and there can be nothing more important than to think rightly about Him.

Now it is sometimes said that, because religion has taken such varied forms and has been so mixed up with magic and superstition and absurd beliefs, it is just the product of human fancy, and that its universal presence among men affords no proof whatever that God exists. Clearly we must grant that, if we believe something to be true, that by itself is no evidence that it is true. We may dream of ourselves as being kings, we may wish to be kings, but neither dreaming nor wishing makes us kings in fact. So far all that can

be proved from the universal presence of religion is that mankind has in all ages believed that a God (or gods) exists. But why has it so believed? Why have men spent so much time and labour in constructing systems of religion? That is the real question which calls for an answer. The reason is that there was within man a need which religion alone could satisfy. From the very first there was something stirring in man which drove him to find in the existence of God the explanation of much which puzzled him in his experience, whether of himself or of the natural world outside him. And why was there this need in man? Why had man a nature which demanded religion for its satisfaction? Unless we are ready to believe that the universe made itself, we can only say that whatever Power made it, made also man with his quest for God.

This may be called arguing in a circle, arguing from man's need of religion to God's existence, and at the same time assuming God's existence to account for man's need. It is arguing in a circle, but when we are seeking for proof of the existence of God we have to use a kind of circular argument.

Along no one line of proof can we reach the conclusion that God exists. Many lines of proof converge to establish it; and we reach it, not by strict logic, but by methods of very varying kinds.

Thus we may argue from what we see around us, from the order and plan and beauty of Nature, to a Creator who designed the universe; or we may argue from what we find within ourselves, from our spiritual constitution and from the fact that our "reach exceeds our grasp," to the existence of a Supreme Spiritual Being to whom our spirits turn for satisfaction. Or we may begin at the other end, and assuming the existence of God as the Spirit of Holy Love, who has made man for fellowship with Himself, see whether that assumption does not best explain certain facts in our experience, such as the persistence of conscience, the haunting presence of moral ideals, or the remarkable religious outlook of the Hebrew prophets. We have many reasons for believing in God which cannot be put into logical form, for life is larger than logic, and most of us do not arrive at the idea of God by any process of argument. We were told about Him by our parents and

teachers when we were quite young, and the idea of God has developed with our mental growth. Indeed, a good case could be made out for the assertion that the idea is latent or implicit in our consciousness from the beginning, and that we could not know ourselves as finite unless we already possessed the idea of the infinite, or attach any meaning to the ideas of the imperfect and changing, unless we were somehow aware at the same time of the perfect and permanent. When we ponder on the meaning of the word 'God,' and think of Him as the source and ground of the universe, the fount of light and truth "in whom we live and move and have our being," the Father of our spirits and the goal of our deepest desires, we shall realize how inadequate must be any arguments we can use to establish the existence of such a Being. He is something far greater than the conclusion of a train of reasoning: all our reasoning, if we explore its foundations, really rests upon the presupposition that He is already present. We can but cry out with the psalmist, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising,

thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether" (cxxxix. 1-4).

The origin of religion lies so far back in the remote past that it cannot be discovered. Various explanations have been offered of the way in which religion arose, but none of them is completely convincing. It seems probable that religion began with a vague sense or feeling of God, an awareness that there was some Power or Presence behind the visible scene, and that the development of religion has consisted in the gradual unfolding of what was involved in this primitive germ. One likes to believe that God, who made man for communion with Himself, has never left Himself without witness in the human heart, and that the pre-historic savage, living in cave or forest half a million years ago, was not without some sense of God, however dim, which might ripen in the beyond into fuller knowledge. There would surely have been enough in his experience to awake in him this sense of the divine. Sun, moon and stars, the

crash of the thunder, the wonder of the springtime, the wonder of his own being, his breath on a frosty morning, death and sleep, and the dreams in which at times his dead seemed to come back to him —all these would arouse his awe and curiosity and make him aware of the presence of a mystery surrounding his life.

Should we give the name of man to a being who had no religious sense whatever? We should, I think, hesitate to give it to one who was without any appreciation of the difference between right and wrong, for the power to grasp moral distinctions we judge to be one of the characteristic marks of man compared with the lower animals. In the long story of evolution it is impossible to say at what point in the process man with his distinctive qualities emerged, but we may be reasonably sure that the sense of God, vague and misty though it may have been, was present very early in the story of the human race. If there was any spark of the divine in those pre-historic tribes, would not God, who created them, have made them aware in some fashion of the fact? Religion and man, then, may have been

born together. We know not ; we cannot reproduce the vanished past.

> Who can see the green earth any more
> As she was by the sources of Time ?
> Who imagines her fields as they lay
> In the sunshine, unworn by the plough ?
> Who thinks as they thought,
> The tribes who then roamed on her breast,
> Her vigorous, primitive sons ? [1]

But whatever was the historical origin of religion, and however lowly were its beginnings, it is here to-day among us in all its power ; and we must judge of it, not as something which is discredited by its humble ancestry, but as something which, because it has God behind it, is rich with meaning and promise of future growth.

The vast majority, then, of mankind believes in the existence of God, but there are some thinkers who deny that we possess the capacity to answer the question whether He exists or not. They are called agnostics, a word which means ignorance, or absence of knowledge. The strict agnostic maintains that we can have no knowledge of

1. Matthew Arnold, *The Future.*

ultimate reality. By the constitution of our minds we are cut off from knowing anything but phenomena or the appearance of things. What lies behind the outward show of the world is completely hidden from us. In point of fact, however, there are very few strict agnostics. Most, who call themselves agnostics, would allow that there was some unknown Power on which the universe depended, but would deny that we can say anything about this Power except that it exists. This was Herbert Spencer's creed, and we are at once struck by its want of logic. For if we can know nothing about ultimate reality, how can we even affirm that such a power exists? And if we can know that it exists, why cannot we know more about it? If one wire can link us with the Unknown, why should there not be more wires?

How cold and cheerless is this creed (or want of creed) of agnosticism! For thousands of years mankind has been searching for God and has believed that it has found Him. Are we to be told that all this search has been in vain, that we have been chasing a will-o'-the-wisp, that prayer

is fruitless, that for our deepest desires and yearnings there is no satisfaction? Is the whole race permanently in the position of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel who cried aloud from midday to evening, "but there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded"? You will not easily persuade men that the only object of their worship is an Unknowable God. Unknown in part doubtless He is, and because we want to know more about Him we go on searching; but He is not Unknowable, unless we are content to brush all religion away as illusion. And is there nothing to be said on the other side? Concede the existence of God, and then ask whether it is unreasonable to suppose that He may have met men's search by giving a progressive revelation of Himself. If there is behind the visible scene a Being who is expressing Himself through the universe (and the agnostic who accepts God's existence cannot deny that the universe proceeds from Him), may we not believe that such a Being, who made man with his impulse to seek for God, would not leave him to grope in the dark, but would throw some light on the path of his search? Agnosticism

is both philosophically unsound and spiritually unsatisfying. The human heart rebels against it, and the human intellect, while it recognizes its limitations, is not prepared to acquiesce in a doctrine which merely mocks its earnest endeavours to reach the truth. "Clouds and darkness are round about him"; yes, but "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his seat." The world becomes a meaningless, irrational place, unless we can trust the affirmations of our spiritual nature, when they point to the existence of One in Whom our moral ideals are permanently realized. The strongest argument for the existence of God lies in the fact of spiritual values. The Good, the True, the Beautiful are as much facts, though of a different order, as the trees and rocks and houses; and there is something within us which tells us that these spiritual values have eternal worth, that they are not just beautiful fancies painted by our imagination, but witness to a spiritual world beyond time. And since spiritual values have meaning only for persons, we may go further and say that they witness to the existence of an Eternal Spirit, a personal fount of holiness and

truth and beauty. To explain the human spirit you must postulate the existence of a Divine Spirit, between whom and the human spirit there is a measure of real kinship.

No doubt is more distressing than the doubt whether God exists, or, if He does exist, whether he cares for men and takes any interest in them. That doubt comes to us all, perhaps, at times, and when it comes it brings with it the "darkness which may be felt." Life loses not only all its joy, but all its meaning, and a deadly spiritual paralysis creeps over our whole being. The way to meet that doubt is to take our stand upon the fact of our own existence as moral and spiritual persons. Let each one say to himself, "Here am I with my spiritual nature. I have a body, but I am a spirit. I have a conscience; I hear the call of the right, and something urges me to follow it. I am haunted by the presence of ideals. In my best moments I long to be better than I am. I pass judgments of value. I recognize at once that the Good and the True are worthy objects of pursuit. They shine like fixed stars in the heavens above me. I read the story of the universe,

and I see—I cannot help seeing—a spiritual purpose unfolding itself. The long course of evolution has resulted in the production of persons like myself with the same spiritual nature and the same need of God to satisfy it. The whole of this spiritual side of life loses its meaning if there be no God. I will fight down my doubt by affirming my own spiritual value. I will call my will into play, that creative centre of my being, and live as if God were the most real of realities. Never will I allow my higher nature to doubt its own rational worth." In this way we shall gradually conquer our doubts. Light will break through the darkness, and God will become real again. By living out our spiritual affirmations we shall strengthen our intellectual hold upon them. It is the lesson which Carlyle enforced in *Sartor Resartus*. "Most true is it, as a wise man teaches us, that 'Doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by Action.' On which ground, too, let him who gropes painfully in darkness or uncertain light, and prays vehemently that the dawn may ripen into day, lay this other precept well to heart, which to me was of invaluable service: '*Do the Duty which lies nearest*

thee,' which thou knowest to be a Duty! Thy second Duty will already have become clearer." [1]

1. The Everlasting Yea.

Chapter II *The Making of an Atheist*

The fool hath said in his heart There is no God.—
PSALM xiv. 1.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.—
ST. MATTHEW v. 8.

ATHEISM is the denial that God exists. The atheist who dogmatically makes that denial is certainly a courageous person, but there is not much humility about his mental attitude. His denial implies a claim that he has exhausted the secrets of the universe, that he knows all about it, has sounded all its mysteries and can assert positively that there is no God anywhere. What a marvellous thing matter must be for the atheist! Out of it has grown mind and the human spirit with all its achievements in art and knowledge, mind which turns round and studies the matter which is supposed to have given it birth! Here indeed is an act of faith to which theism can show no parallel. "He that made the

eye, shall he not see ? " Can mind emerge in the evolutionary process if it were not there behind the process ? Only spirit can account for spirit. The most cunning combination of atoms divorced from any kind of spiritual principle could never produce a spiritual being such as man.

The atheism which dogmatically denies God's existence may be called intellectual or speculative atheism. There is no trace of it in the Bible. No speculative atheist ever appears in the pages of Scripture. Even in that book of doubts, Ecclesiastes, the writer's scepticism never leads him to question God's existence. It would be an interesting study to trace out the prevalence of speculative atheism at different periods of the world's history, and to discover the causes which produced it. Some of those causes are not strictly intellectual. A large part of the atheism of the French Revolution period, for example, was the result, not of speculative enquiry, but of deliberate disregard of moral principles. There is, as we shall shortly see, a practical atheism, which leaves God out of account in daily life; and this, if long continued may result in a speculative atheism. Of the strictly

intellectual causes of atheism, in England at any rate, the most potent has been physical science with its mechanical modes of interpretation. For its own purposes science sets out to describe the universe in purely physical terms, treats it, that is, as if it were a machine and nothing more. It is not the business of science to concern itself with ultimate problems. Whether there is a God or not, is not a question which comes within the purview of science. But we can easily understand how a scientific enquirer, who spends all of his days in a laboratory investigating matter, and is continually thinking in terms of physics and chemistry, may begin to dogmatize and assert that matter alone exists. The ideal of describing the universe as a machine, which is a perfectly legitimate ideal, may quickly generate the belief that it is a machine and nothing more.[1]

The conflict between science and religion, which was at its height in England in the latter half of the nineteenth century, is to-day far less violent. It was born of misunderstandings on both sides. Each set

1. There are signs that the method and ideal of science are changing.

of combatants now appreciates better the position of the other. The atheism which characterized so many scientific pronouncements fifty or sixty years ago has, to a great extent, vanished; while the theologian, if he is wise, is showing himself more ready to accept from science the assured results of its enquiries, and in the light of them to examine his own traditional doctrines. Science and theology will still fight many a battle, but it is an immense gain to have it established that science and religion are respectively pursuing different enquiries. There is a world of matter, and there is a world of spirit. The facts of the latter world, such as human freedom or the existence of moral ideals and judgments of value, cannot be mathematically weighed or chemically tested; yet they are just as real, just as much facts, as the atom and the molecule. Supposing that physical science reached its ideal of describing the universe as a machine, the description could be nothing more than partial and one-sided, for it would apply only to the material aspect of the universe. A cross-section of reality does not give you reality in its concrete wholeness. The world will prob-

ably always have its speculative atheists; but atheism as an intellectual system will never win many converts, because it will always be confronted by the facts of the world of spirit and the hunger of the human heart for God.

Practical atheism, on the other hand, is common enough. The fool of the parable was a practical atheist, when he said to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry." He put on one side all thoughts of God and lived his life as if God had no claim upon him. The fool of the psalmist was a practical, not an intellectual atheist. He did not deny with his head that God existed; "in his heart" he said "there is no God." He determined, that is, to act in his daily life without regard to the call of the higher things of God. He starved one half of his nature, and that the better half, with the inevitable result that spiritual atrophy set in. There are fishes in the abysmal depths of ocean which have eye-sockets but no eyes. In the long course of the centuries the eye, through never being used in an environment where there is no light, has gradually

degenerated, till it has ceased to be. A limb, if not exercised, begins to wither. What is true of the bodily organs is equally true of the soul. Our spiritual eye grows dim if we neglect to train it. If we do not "practise the presence of God," God becomes an unreality. Hence the importance of St. Paul's advice to Timothy, "exercise thyself unto godliness."

God can be found and known only through the diligent searching which involves real effort. The case is the same in the matter of human friendship. There is all the difference in the world between friendship and acquaintanceship. You may have a passing acquaintance with a man, but if he is to become your real friend you must take pains to know him. You must be ready to share his interests, to admit him to your inmost counsels, to sacrifice yourself on his behalf. There must be "give and take" on both sides. How can we expect to know God, if we will not take trouble? The religion of many grown-up people is the religion of their childhood. They have not advanced in knowledge of God because they have not set themselves to understand God. They give but little time to prayer, they do not read

their Bibles or many serious books, they do not live in the atmosphere of spiritual values which Jesus breathed, and yet they are surprised that religion is rather unreal to them. God! the Infinite Spirit of Wisdom, and Love and Holiness!—how can we hope to become friends with Him, if we do not make His interests our own, and if we are not ready to explore the depths of His nature? Very few men, whose conception of God has not grown with their mental growth, can retain the freshness of the religion of their childhood, and without that freshness the child's religion is not suitable to the man. For in other matters he has "put away childish things," and so needs a broader and deeper conception of God. If his religion remains that of the child, it means in most cases that he has neglected to train his spiritual faculties. His development has been one-sided. He has the man's outlook on the world, but the child's religious outlook, only without that fresh and living sense of God which makes a child's faith a thing so real and sacred. Happy are they who can keep untainted to the end the child's wonder in, and reverence for, things divine! Such a rich possession is the gift of God. He

gives it to those who seek Him faithfully, who cultivate His friendship, who put spiritual values first, who, like Jacob by the margin of the brook, wrestle with Him, saying "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." "Beautiful things are difficult," says the old Greek proverb. But there is a spiritual joy in the quest for them, which is its own reward; and it is in the struggle that we find God, become assured of His presence, and win that inner serenity of soul which assurance of God always brings with it.

Practical atheism springs from many roots, and it is, perhaps, never possible for one human being to judge rightly in this matter of another. Was this what the writer of Psalm xvii implied when he prayed, "let my sentence come forth from thy presence"? Men were ready to misjudge him, but God could read his heart and knew that his intentions were pure. He could appeal to the divine judgment with perfect confidence. But, difficult though it is to judge of another, we are surely not wrong in saying that in an immense number of cases the seeds of practical atheism are sown in childhood. How different is the upbringing of two children! One comes from a slum home,

where the influences of religion hardly exist; the other from a home hallowed by the fear of God. What chance has the former to develop character or to win any knowledge of God as his Father? In those plastic years of childhood, when impressions are so deeply registered, he has been moulded on the wrong pattern, and when he faces life for himself his spiritual handicap is immense. Unless something happens to give him a new vision and a new start he is certain to become a practical atheist. Plato in *The Republic* would have the children of the ideal state brought up "in a fair pasture," that from the earliest days they might drink in what was noble and excellent. Wordsworth put his Lucy to school with Nature while she was a child, that beauty might "pass into her face," and that her spirit might win from Nature something of its sublimity and peace. Jesus said "Suffer the little children to come unto me," which we may interpret as a call to tell the child (we can hardly begin too early) of the Love of God, and how God claims and needs the child's life. Grave indeed is the responsibility which rests upon those who have the care of children. "The child

is father of the man." It is difficult though, thank God, not impossible to reverse the growth of the early years.

Practical atheism may very easily become the condition of any one of us, and we have strenuously to guard against it. Real religion involves method, the habit of devotion, spiritual self-discipline. We must allow time for the search after God. This is where many of us fail. We do not "study to be quiet." We take pains enough to master a language, if we need it for our work or self-culture; we put our energies into money-making and worldly pursuits, and are ready to make sacrifices to attain our end; but we give only a few minutes each day, and perhaps not even those, for the quest of the highest end. If we are really to know God, if He is to be an experience and not a formula, if our religion is to be a living and growing thing, three things at least we must do.

First, we must learn to pray. Prayer, which is not mere formal repetition of words, or the endeavour to persuade God to do what we want, is our highest means of communion with the Father of our spirits. It involves genuine self-consecration, the

uplifting of our whole personality to God, the bending of our will so that it may conform to the divine will. It is the bringing of our soul into conscious union with God and His purposes, so that between Him and ourselves there is identity of aim and endeavour. God is not we, and we are not God. Religion presupposes the existence of an object of worship other than the worshipper. But though God is the Other to whom we pray, real prayer quickly proves that this Other is not a distant Being sundered from us by a vast gulf, but is in very truth the Life of our life, close at hand, inspiring us by His Spirit, and personally present in all our highest aspirations. We discover our true selves in discovering God, and the knowledge of God brings enlargement and quickening to our personality. Prayer is a living experience of God, and the experience is inexhaustible. Attempts have been made to explain prayer in purely subjective terms. Thus a man may say, "I do not pray to God, but I sit down and meditate, and form new resolutions, and brace my will to fresh endeavour, and I find that in this way I do become a better man. Yet I have done it all by myself. The hypothesis

of a God who gives added power to the man who prays is unnecessary." One could accept that explanation of prayer only if it could be proved that the man has done it all by himself. Who inspired him to sit down and meditate and form new resolutions? May it not have been the very Spirit of God whom he refuses to recognize? Who can say where the human ends and the divine begins? If "in Him we live and move and have our being," is there any human spirit into which His life is not flowing? And against that explanation of prayer is the whole range of the experience of those who have prayed. They will tell you that a power not their own came to them, that their wills received divine reinforcement, that prayer released the energy of God so that it became available for themselves. Why should they not be believed? It is difficult indeed to construct a theory of prayer; but if God wishes us to be instruments of His will, if He has committed to us the carrying out of His purposes, it is not unreasonable to suppose that He can give us power for our task. But He gives it only on conditions; the chief of which is that we are really one with Him in interest and

purpose. Prayer is, as we have seen, the act of self-consecration by which our will is blended with God's will. If God possesses power to help us, will He not be able to release it only just in proportion as we have learned in prayer to identify ourselves with Him? This at any rate is true, that if we grow in prayer we shall become more sure of God; and without prayer God will remain an unreality.

The second thing which we must do is to study the Bible, that great text-book of religious experience. The effect upon a man's life and character of a reverent study of Scripture is incalculable. Bible reading has gone out of fashion, partly, perhaps, because the idea has spread abroad that scholarship has discredited the Bible; and partly because it is realized that an intelligent study of the Bible in the light of our new knowledge means time and effort, which many are not ready to give. Only those who do not know what they are talking about will say that scholarship has destroyed the value of the Bible. It has enormously enhanced its value. It has shown what an extraordinary collection of writings we have here, like nothing else

in the world, writings which contain the record of a progressive self-revelation of God culminating in the coming of Jesus Christ. We may have to adopt new views as to the meaning of Inspiration or the method of composition of some of the books of the Bible; but the spiritual worth of the Bible shines out all the more clearly. If anyone is puzzled over the Old Testament let him read the New Testament, and then work back to the Old Testament. Let him reverently study the life of Jesus, pondering and praying over what he reads, and he will find himself gradually growing into the likeness of Christ. Or let him read the letters of St. Paul. There you have the genuine letters of a man whose whole life had been changed by Jesus Christ.[1] In those letters he describes his own spiritual career, tells us what his temptations were and how he overcame them, tells us what Christ meant to him in the perplexities and interests of his life as a missionary. It is the transcript

1. Some scholars question the genuineness of Ephesians and II Thessalonians, and the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles is a subject of much dispute. But only extreme critics of the left wing would deny the genuineness of the others.

of an experience of God which grew richer as St. Paul came to know more about Jesus Christ. What helped him will help us. There is life for our souls in his words and experiences. "He being dead yet speaketh." Spiritual study of the Bible is possible without knowledge of what the scholars have written, though the more we know about the Scriptures and their origin and growth the better it is. But a scholarly study of the Bible is no adequate substitute for a religious study of it. The Bible must be read with the heart and will as well as with the head, if it is to prove its worth. "Every scripture," says St. Paul, "inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (II Tim. iii. 16, 17). The Bible tells us about God and about ourselves in relation to God. Its words come home to the heart with extraordinary power. "For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart."

(Heb. iv. 12). A book of instruction giving principles for life; a mirror in which we see ourselves as we are in God's sight; a well of water where the spirit may find cleansing and refreshment; the record of an experience of God broadening and deepening through many centuries; and in it one central Figure on whom all lines from the past converge, and from whom all lives move out into the future—such is the Bible. How can we hope to know God or our own souls, unless we will read it?

The third thing to be done if we would grow in the knowledge of God is contained in those words of Jesus recorded in the Fourth Gospel, "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of his teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from myself" (vii. 17). We must live out our creed. We have already seen how the resolute affirmation of our own value as spiritual beings is one of the best methods of driving away doubt about the reality of God. But we must travel a stage further. We must apply in the details of our daily living the truth about God which we have reached. Let us state the matter in the simplest possible

way as St. John has stated it in his First Epistle. He says there, "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now" (ii. 9); and again, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen" (iv. 20). Truth about God must be translated from the abstract to the concrete. If so translated it progressively verifies itself in experience. If we believe that God is Love let us show love in our social relationships. Our hold upon this truth about Him will be strengthened in this way; and, further, we shall be making ourselves channels through which the life of God may flow in upon us. God is unreal to so many people because they do not try to realize His presence in their daily conduct. Religious truth is not like the abstract truth of geometry. Religion involves the whole man, will, mind, feeling, and its fullness can be grasped only by the co-operation of all sides of our nature. If we would know God we must live as sons of God. Jesus described Himself, not only as the Truth, but as the Way and the Life. God waits to make Himself known to us.

Our part is to open our hearts to receive Him, to do His will, to cultivate His friendship. Through life, with its manifold opportunities for loyalty to the highest and service of the brethren, does the Living God reveal Himself.

Chapter III *Waiting upon God*

My soul waiteth only upon God: from him cometh my salvation.—PSALM lxii. 1.

In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.—ISAIAH XXX. 15.

MAN has been searching for God since religion dawned, and each one of us has to search for God, if God is to be real in our lives. Religion calls for effort, exploration, experiment. Our spiritual nature has to be trained before it can make adequate response to its spiritual surroundings. But man's search for God is not the deepest truth about religion. Behind man's search for God lies God's search for man. The priority rests with God. There would have been no religion if God had not from the first implanted in human nature the religious impulse. Having created in man the desire to know Himself, would God have left man without guidance? Is it not reasonable to suppose that to match man's search

for Him He would have given man a revelation of Himself? The picture of God which the Bible offers is of One who seeks to make man a sharer in His truth, who progressively reveals Himself to man according to man's capacity to understand. It is not God's wish to live in isolated splendour. It is His nature to go out of Himself and express Himself in a created universe. Spirit is always creative, and God is Spirit. God, says the Bible, made man in His own image, gave him, that is, a share of the divine nature, so that he might hold fellowship with his Maker. If that is the basal truth about man, then God must have wanted to make that fellowship as rich as possible. And He did it, as we believe, by giving to man, not all at once, but gradually, a revelation of Himself. So that behind all human discovery of God lies God's unfolding of Himself. Between man's discovery and God's revelation no sharp line can be drawn.

The nature of God is discussed in later chapters. The point I want to make now is, that this thought of the divine initiative, of God going out to search for man that He may gradually educate him in

knowledge of Himself, has important practical consequences for our every day religious life. It suggests that our highest wisdom may be to follow the advice so often given in the Psalms and "wait upon God." Has He something to say to me? Has the Father a message for His child? Let me be still and listen for His voice. Religion has a passive as well as an active side. A wood or a meadow is full of sounds, which we do not hear if we walk rapidly through them. But if we lie down under a tree or in the long grass and listen, we become aware of this world of varied sound. So it is with God. He speaks in the secret places of the soul; He draws near in the stillness, when the voices of the world are hushed. Prayer is always effort, for there must be the sustained effort of concentration; but at least as important in prayer as our strivings and wrestlings with God, are our deliberate relaxation and quiet expectancy of what He may have to tell us. Our prayers are so often poor and unsatisfying because we are hurried. We do not give ourselves time to be quiet. We try to rush at God instead of waiting for God to come to us. If we are to pray for five minutes,

it has been said, let us take the first three of them in putting ourselves into the right attitude for praying during the other two. The first condition of effective prayer is to realize the presence of God.

It is interesting to note how modern psychology is emphasizing the importance of passivity in the formation of character. We are told that the imagination has proved itself to be stronger than the will, and hence that victory over temptation is not to be had by the road of strenuous struggle and volitional effort. A man, let us suppose, who has been the victim of some evil habit, makes up his mind one day that he will have done with it. He says to himself, "I *will* snap this chain which binds me. I will banish this hateful thing from my life. I will summon up all my powers and resist the temptation when it comes with the whole force of my being." He does that, and he fails. Psychology tells us that he did the wrong thing in so acting. What he ought to have done was, not to struggle, but to suggest to himself that he was certain to conquer. He ought to have put before his imagination a picture of himself

as already victor. Let the struggle of the will cease; let the man be quiet and simply dwell on the idea of victory, banishing all thoughts of past failure or of the difficulty of the fight; let him keep steadily before the mind's eye the picture of himself as he is going to be, grow into that idea, and with quiet confidence await the issue. And when he makes these suggestions to himself let him make them when all tension is gone, when body and spirit are both relaxed, when the hour of sleep is near. The suggestions will work underground, as it were. Unconsciously in the hidden depths of his personality they will take root, and from them will spring the new impulses which will displace the old, evil impulses.

Are we right in such a case as this of speaking of a conflict between the will and the imagination? I question if we are; because the essence of an act of volition is attention. We attend to the thing we want to do, and when we have concentrated our minds long enough upon it, action follows of necessity. Here, before any suggestion of victory can take effect, the man must attend to the suggestion, and that is an act of will.

He must steadily hold before his imagination the idea of himself as conqueror. Even when his whole being is in state of relaxation, he must be sufficiently awake to attend and concentrate his mind on the suggestions which he is going to make. The conflict is not so much one between will and imagination, as between two aspects of will, between will as violent struggle, and as quiet attention to an end to be realized. The will is the crown of human personality, and any teaching which minimizes its importance or robs it of its supremacy in the guidance of life is to be deprecated. That there are powerful forces operating in us which belong to the sub-conscious levels of our personality is certain ; but when they emerge above the threshold of consciousness we have to exercise our reason and will upon them. We have to rationalize them and relate them to our ideals and purposes. Similarly, it rests with our own choice what kind of suggestions we send down to the sub-conscious regions, and what form they take when they emerge again into consciousness.

Religious teachers have always known that in the upbuilding of character the

negative method of repression is never as effective as the positive method of expansion. You must, of course, pull out the weeds in your lawn, if you wish it to be good turf; but it is just as important to see that the grass is sown thickly, so that there is less room for weeds to find foothold. And we have to avoid occasions of temptation, and to say 'No' to evil suggestions if we would grow in character. But it is weary work always to be saying 'No.' It is better to fill our minds with new and positive thoughts of goodness, and to busy ourselves with fresh interests, so that the old temptations have less chance of asserting themselves. "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do" sums up the matter. The man who is haunted by the memory of his frequent failures in the past becomes, even against his will, a coward. He goes into the battle afraid, dreading that he will fall again; and he is in no sound mood to fight. He has defeated himself before the conflict has begun. But the man who goes into the battle with a vision of himself as triumphant, not boastfully but with a quiet confidence, is far more likely to win. "In returning and rest shall ye

be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

Now psychology, as a science, is not concerned with such a question as whether God can help man in his fight for character. The psychologist, if he is a religious man, may urge someone who comes to him for advice, to see whether he cannot get aid from religion; and most psychologists recognize to the full the enormous help which religion is. But for psychology, as such, it is a matter of indifference whether God really exists, or whether we only believe that He exists. An ultimate problem of that kind concerns philosophy and theology, and not science. But we, with our life to live and our daily struggles after goodness, are most vitally concerned with the question whether God can give us power to conquer. The unhesitating verdict of Christian experience is that man is not left to struggle alone. "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." St. Paul had no greater certitude in his life than that he was receiving power from Jesus Christ.

Let us assume that to be true, and then see how the situation is changed for the man whose case we have been discussing.

He has struggled painfully and persistently in the past and has failed. Now he is going to adopt the advice of the psychologist and try the more passive method. He is going to suggest to himself that he is already victorious. He is going into the fight, having banished the haunting memories of earlier defeats with the fear which they engender, his imagination filled with the bright vision of himself with a new character, cleansed and attracted by the good. Is that enough? Would not his self-suggestions be far more powerful if he could say to himself, "I see myself made new by *the power of God;* I know that, if I open my heart to receive Him, Jesus Christ, the Friend of such storm-tossed people as myself, will give me His living sympathy and His aid?" To "wait upon God" is a more effective thing to do than to wait upon an idea of yourself as a renovated character, once you grant that the Spirit of the Living God can really enter into human personality. Of all the suggestions which we can make to ourselves when we set out to break the fetters of a cramping past, none is more powerful than the suggestion that God is waiting to help us. The suggestion gains, of course, in value in

proportion to the adequacy and spirituality of our conception of God. And it is here that Christianity holds the field against all other religions, because of the marvel and attractiveness of its picture of God. It presents God as One who longs for nothing more than that His children shall wait upon Him. The Father's heart yearns for the love of the child. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father was on the watch for the wanderer's return, and went out to meet him when he saw him in the distance. God, so Jesus taught, is Love; and love craves fellowship, and by an inner necessity goes out of itself to form ties of connexion with others. And love forgives, so that we need not be kept away from seeking communion with God by the sense of our unworthiness. True repentance at once opens the road to renewed friendship with God. The Christian picture of God is of a Father with His hands full of blessings, which He holds in reserve for those who seek Him and are willing to share His interests.

The man, then, who waits upon God is ready to believe that God can really work in his life, can do things in and through him; and he acts upon that belief, not only

by having definite times when he deliberately seeks to realize the presence of God, but by preserving, as a master principle of his life, the temper of expectancy. He keeps his soul open to the divine, seeks for signs of God in common things, is ever spiritually alert. This is part of what St. Paul meant by "faith." In the story of St. Paul we have an illustration of the contrast between the two tempers we have been discussing. Before his conversion he was the struggler, trying to keep the whole law, fighting to be "righteous" by a stern process of self-discipline. After his conversion, though he did not relax his efforts to live up to the higher standard of Christian living, he had taken the momentous step of committing himself to Jesus Christ, as to One who could mould his life and heighten his natural powers. Henceforth, he walks as a man who knows that the secret of noble and happy living lies in putting God first; in trusting Him for what He is, and for what He has done; in waiting upon Him in the quiet confidence that He is a source of life and power.[1]

1. In Dodd's *The Meaning of Paul for To-day* there is an interesting treatment of this change. cp. ch. ix.

Not otherwise was it with Jacob when he wrestled with his strange opponent in the night by the brook Jabbok (Genesis xxxii). He was at the crisis of his career. Twenty years before he had, by an act of gross deceit, overreached his brother Esau, from whose anger he had been compelled to fly. Now he was returning and had received news that his brother with an armed band was coming to meet him. Having made the necessary dispositions for the safety of the caravan, he keeps his lonely watch by the margin of the stream. His conscience would not let him sleep. His past of greed and selfishness and sin came surging into his memory. He was by no means wholly a bad man; there were real elements of religion in him; but his character had not received its definite set or tendency. He was a man wrestling with his past self, wrestling with God whose Spirit moves in the stings of conscience and in the call to higher things. The story in poetic fashion pictures this struggle as a wrestling with a real opponent. "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." All through the night the struggle went on until the stranger

by a divine touch paralyzed Jacob's natural strength: "And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained, as he wrestled with him." Jacob was beaten, but he had, and used, the beaten man's resource. He clung to his opponent, now seen to be a friend in disguise, and refused to let him go until he had won from him a blessing. The hour of Jacob's weakness proved to be the hour of his strength: He received the blessing; the blessing of the new name which signified the new character. No more was he to be called Jacob or Deceiver, but Israel or Perseverer with God. When his natural strength was rendered powerless the blessing came. Then, and not till then, could God work in Jacob the change He longed to effect. Jacob had to be passive before God, had to wait upon God, before God could transform him.

In the Lord's Prayer, as has often been pointed out, before we make any petition for ourselves, we are bidden to wait upon God. "Our Father which art in heaven." God is, and He is a Father, and He is in heaven. Heaven is where God is, and if

we would draw near to Him in prayer we must first try to be in heaven ourselves, and realize His presence. "Hallowed be thy name." Name stands for character. We are bidden to think of the nature of Him to whom we pray: "Take off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Our temper must be one of reverence and awe; not the fear that makes us cringe or doubt if One so lofty will hear our prayer; but the quiet solemnity of the man who is coming into the presence of the Great Father of his spirit. "Thy kingdom come." We link ourselves up with the purposes of God. We think of the accomplishment of His will; we want to be one with that will, to have no will of our own, but to put ourselves entirely into His hands that He may use us as His agents. That is the kind of atmosphere in which waiting upon God becomes a reality. No one who has ever practised such waiting upon God can doubt its value for the life of prayer, or thought, or action. "Until I went into the sanctuary of God." Go into the sanctuary of His presence and test for yourself the result.

Chapter IV *The Nature of God*

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.—ISAIAH lvii. 15.

And he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.—REVELATION xxi. 5.

WE cannot help seeing purpose at work in the world in which we live. The story of this planet, which science has unfolded, is the story of a process which seems to be moving towards an end. A vast scheme of evolution is presented, which is something more than a mere sequence of changes. The changes appear to be directed to a goal. And as the process develops it seems to gain in significance, it grows richer as time goes on. Originally this planet had no life upon it. It went through a long period of inorganic change, during which its crust was being gradually fitted for the reception of living organisms. Then life appeared,

at first in very lowly fashion, but endowed with the capacity for advance. Through millions of years the development of life went on, until man came upon the scene; not as we know him now, but rude, uncivilized, and with the marks of his animal ancestry plain upon him. But there was that in man which distinguished him from the beasts. He possessed a capacity for moral and intellectual growth which no animal possesses, and in virtue of that capacity he has in the course of the ages become what he is to-day, a being with rich spiritual endowment, knowing God and striving after moral ideals. As we review this story of evolution we are compelled to see in it the unfolding of a spiritual purpose. The earlier stages of the evolution do not contain the meaning of the whole—that is revealed in the later stages. They show us what was intended all along by God, whose purpose was the creation by gradual stages of human personality, and the calling into being of a society or kingdom of persons who should live in fellowship together. When we are trying to understand the Nature of God, we naturally search among the things which He made for indi-

cations of that nature. And when we find so plainly marked out this line of advance from the inorganic, through the living, to the personal and spiritual, we conclude that God is a purposeful Being who is interested in spiritual matters. For there must be in the Creator powers adequate to produce what appears in His creation. And if man possesses the moral, intellectual and spiritual qualities which make him the crown of the visible creation, we rightly argue that there must be in God something truly akin to spirit and moral reason.

Evolution, it cannot be too often affirmed, is a descriptive and not an explanatory term. The doctrine of evolution describes the stages by which this planet has become what it is, and the methods (so far as they have been discovered) by which the succession of changes has come about. But why there has been any evolution at all, and why it has taken a spiritual direction, evolutionary science is not competent to say. It is not concerned with ultimate questions of this kind, which it leaves to the theologian and philosopher. We, however, are impelled by our reason to ask the question, Why ? and the further question, What is the meaning

of this vast process of development? I know no answer to these questions, which can in any way satisfy us, except that which places a Creative Mind and Will behind the process. When the doctrine of evolution was first propounded many people, including theologians who ought to have known better, were alarmed at it. The cry was raised that God was being banished from His universe, and His place taken by a blind tendency or force. But as the doctrine became better understood, it was seen that instead of banishing God, it revealed the marvel of His creative activity. The older view of creation taught that God made things suddenly by an instantaneous exercise of His volition, and their view claimed the support of the Bible. We know now that things were not made suddenly, but gradually, and that the creative activity of God has never ceased. The laws of Nature are God at work. And we have learned that the account of creation in Genesis is not to be taken as a strictly historical and scientific statement of how the world was made, but as giving us "a series of *representative pictures*—none, indeed, *corresponding*, in actual fact, to the reality,

but all *standing for*, or *representing* it,—of the various stages by which the earth was gradually formed, and peopled with its living inhabitants. . . . The slow formation of the earth as taught by geology, the gradual development of species by the persistent accumulation of minute variations, made probable by modern biology, are but the exhibition in detail of those processes which the author of this cosmogony sums up into a single phase and apparently compresses into a single moment, for the purpose of declaring their dependence upon the Divine will." [1]

Is a thing any less the handiwork of God because it comes into being slowly and not suddenly? Is there not, on the contrary, a grandeur in the thought of a vast plan being gradually wrought out through enormous epochs of time, and more particularly in the thought of a Creative Will which is ceaselessly bringing the new out of the old? "And he that sitteth on the throne

1. Driver's *The Book of Genesis* in Westminster Commentaries, p. 32. Recent developments in biology have made it plain that advance has not been entirely through the accumulation of "minute variations," but that variations of considerable size do suddenly appear, which are of the utmost importance in determining the course of evolution.

said, Behold I make all things new." It is what God is always doing, in nature, in history; yes, and in the human heart, if men will allow His Spirit to carry out there His creative and redemptive work. The doctrine of evolution has enormously enlarged and enriched our thought of God, and it has brought God close to us. No longer do we think of him as a distant Ruler of the universe, who made it once long ago and now superintends its development; but we think of Him as the indwelling Source of Life, the Creative Spirit who works in and through the process of evolution, leading it on to its spiritual goal. Isaiah[1] called Him "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity," and we must not lose sight of His transcendence. He is above Nature, though He works through Nature. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and the Source from whom come our moral ideals. Beauty, Truth, Goodness have their eternal home in His Being. But though transcendent He is immanent, near at hand, the Friend of man, the Spirit who moves

1. Usually called Second Isaiah. Most of the prophecies from ch. xl. to the end are the work of an unknown writer living towards the close of the exile.

in the human mind and heart. Isaiah emphasizes this aspect of God also, when he says, "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit."

This thought of God as perpetually creating has, surely, great value for our religious life. It wakes our sense of wonder, and wonder helps to keep our religion fresh and vital. What must God be, who makes not only the glory of the stellar heavens, but the beauty of the rose or the intricate delicacy of the sea-shell? In T. E. Brown's Manx poem, *The Doctor*, there is a charming description of the doctor on one of his dredging expeditions told by the fisherman who accompanied him in the boat. Wild with excitement when the dredge-net was pulled up, the doctor sorted out the treasures it contained. We see him

> coaxin' and teazin'
> The fringes, and spreadin' them out on his sleeve,
> But the delicate! you wouldn' believe;
> And the soft and lovin', and a sort of cooin'
> Goin' at him all he was doin'.
> And prayin', you'd think, and passin' the stringers
> Of the long sea-grass betwix' his fingers,
> As y' it wasn' wrack he had there,
> But the holy bread, or a baby's hair.

The creative God is the Living God. Too often we tend to think of Him as a dead God, who, as Carlyle complained, "does nothing." But He is always pouring His life into His creation, making new things, renovating old ones. "Without haste and without rest" He "worketh hitherto," and calls on us to see His presence in the wonders of the world. There is a saying attributed to Jesus which runs "Let not him who seeks . . . cease until he finds, and when he finds he shall be astonished; astonished he shall reach the kingdom, and having reached the kingdom he shall rest." [1] Wonder and reverence are notes of the description of heaven in the Apocalypse. Wonder lifts the soul to a plane where God can speak with man.

But it is not enough to wonder at God's creative power. We must fix our eyes upon the end reached by the process of evolution. The final end is not yet attained; but the actual course taken by the process reveals the end as spiritual in character.

1. One of the sayings discovered in 1903 at Oxyrhynchus, one of the chief cities of ancient Egypt, by Grenfell and Hunt. A fragment of a collection of *Sayings of Jesus* was unearthed, just as in 1897 another collection in fragmentary condition was found.

All has moved towards the production of personality with its free creative power, its moral ideals, its vision of God, its capacity for love and fellowship. In Genesis the last of God's works is man, made in the divine image. And man is the final product of Nature's striving, the goal of the travail of this planet. Man is still in the making, but we can see the broad lines of the divine plan. The perfecting of personality is the end towards which God is guiding humanity. And He is guiding it, not from a distance, but as a Spirit of Holy Love moving in and through human life in closest fellowship with men.

"Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" writes St. Paul (I. Cor. iii. 16). We must think of ourselves as capable of receiving God, as habitations where He may take up His abode; and we must think of God as seeking to enter into human personality to foster its development. It is a thought full both of warning and inspiration. Whatever keeps God out of my life is damaging my most intimate self and hindering my true growth. Whatever admits Him into my life is strengthening His hold

upon me, and is thus directing my self along the path of true advance. Personality is something very sacred. It is, as Jesus taught, of great value in God's eyes. It is a reflection of the personal element in God. In creating a human person God created that which was most like Himself. Let us, then, think of God as continually trying to mould us into the pattern of the perfect personality, which the Christian believes has been shown to the world in the Person of Jesus Christ. It is a spiritual, not a mechanical moulding. Its method is not that of force, but of persuasion and appeal. A forced goodness is a contradiction in terms. A man cannot be made moral by compulsion. God has given us our freedom, and we have to co-operate with Him in His creative task. But all the while His Spirit is striving with our spirits, seeking to persuade us to holiness, and self-sacrifice, and service of our fellow-men. God exercises a ceaseless pressure upon our lives.

Whoever wrote Psalm cxxxix. had penetrated into the very heart of this thought of an ever-present God haunting human life. Escape from God was impossible ; " whither shall I go from thy spirit ? or whither shall

I flee from thy presence ? " Neither heaven, nor the underworld of Sheol, nor the sea's remotest margins, afforded any refuge where the soul could be alone. Always God was there with His knowledge of the inmost thoughts of the heart, seeing right into the secret places of the personality. Faced with this persistent presence of God, what does the psalmist do ? He asks God to come yet closer to him. " Search me, O God, and know my heart : try me and know my thoughts : and see if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." He responds to the divine pressure. He opens his life to God, and prays for cleansing and guidance. That was exactly what God wanted him to do, and wants us to do. For we cannot be our true selves unless we admit God into our lives. Just as in the mind of the painter, before he begins to paint, is the vision of the completed picture with all the meaning which he intends it to convey, so in the mind of God is the ideal pattern of every human life. God knows what He means each one of us to be, what His purpose is for each of His children. We do not know that fully, but we can learn from Him. The life which yields itself

to God and tries to link itself with His purposes grows in understanding, not only of God, but of its own nature and capacity. The road stretches out before it, marked with signposts, and at the far end shines the spiritual city "having the glory of God." What keeps God out from the life is sin; what brings Him into the life is the repentance which is sincere. "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me." Such a cry as that, coming from the depths of the soul, God answers by an access of new power and a growing experience of His love, for it belongs to His nature as Creative Spirit "to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

Chapter V — *God the Revealer*

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God : but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever.—DEUTERONOMY xxix. 29.

Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM *hath sent me unto you.*—EXODUS iii. 14.

WE have seen that we are compelled to think of God as slowly working out a spiritual purpose in the world, a purpose which for its fulfilment requires the co-operation of man. Just because we have a spiritual nature we attribute a nature of the same kind to God. We think of Him as Spirit, that is, as essentially creative. From what we see around us, or find within us, we infer that God is a Being of such a kind that He possesess qualities which are in some measure really akin to the spiritual qualities which we know that we ourselves have. Thus we are led to think of God as revealing Himself, or expressing Himself in what He has created. Human beings express themselves

by word and act. The artist reveals himself in his pictures; the engineer reveals himself in the bridge he makes; our daily conduct at home is an expression of our character. But just as our self-expression is not always equally complete, and we "put more of ourselves" into some actions than we do into others, so there are degrees in the self-revelation of God. The ascending scale of evolution is an ascending scale in the self-expression of God. The world of inorganic matter tells us something about God, but you learn more about Him from a rose than you do from a stone, for the rose has life and the charm of beauty. With each stage of advance new qualities appear, and these throw increasing light upon the nature of God. With man the revelation takes on a yet richer meaning, for then emerge the spiritual characteristics, moral reason, conscience, love and the like, which we believe most clearly express the divine nature. Hence human personality is the best index to the character of God, when it is taken at its highest, as it reaches out after spiritual ideals.

The thought with which this chapter is concerned is the thought that it is part

of God's nature to express Himself. His action in creating a universe, in making man, in redeeming man, in giving a special revelation to the Hebrew race, was not arbitrary, but was the expression of His inmost Being. The divine activity is not due to an irresponsible will which functions capriciously, but the will is the nature or character in operation; so that what God does reveals the consistent purpose of God. This is a conception of God far richer and more worthy than the conception which makes sheer power His chief attribute; and it is the conception of Him which we find in the Bible.

Let us study for the moment the story of Moses at the burning bush in Exodus iii. Moses was being called to the task of liberating his people from their slavery in Egypt. He realized that without the inspiration of religion the task could not be accomplished. These slaves were not yet a nation, they were only a horde. If they were to become a united people, they must have some conception of God which would, not only keep them together, but serve as a stimulus for development. They must find in God a rallying point and a sense of

vocation. Moses asks what name he is to give to God, when he tells the Israelites of the new future which awaits them. Name in the Bible signifies character; and in earlier days, as now among primitive peoples, names were almost universally given expressing certain characteristics which it was thought the owner of the name possessed, or it was hoped he would grow to possess. Moses is told that the divine name is I AM THAT I AM. Now the real meaning of these words is "I will be what I will be," or "I will become what I will become." They speak indeed of Self-Existence, of God the Eternal One, Uncreated, and the Source of all that is; but they add on to the thought of Self-Existence the thought of a Being who will progressively reveal Himself, who will make His nature plain as the years go on. They introduce us to the thought of a God whose nature it is to unfold Himself to man, who is active towards man, and seeks to tell man about Himself. It is as if God said to Moses, "You ask about My name or character. Trust Me, and experience will show you what I am, and what I will be to this people I am calling." It is not too much to say that the whole

history of Israel is a continuous comment upon those words. Israel, as we believe, was the subject of a special divine education. To them was entrusted a special revelation. They were gradually taught to understand more clearly the nature and purposes of God. Step by step were they led on into fuller truth, as they could grasp it, until at length came One, born of that race, in whom the progressive revelation of the past was summed up; One who was the crown and completion of all the earlier manifestations of His nature which God had given.

If we study the nature of God as that is set forth in the Bible we shall see how self-expression belongs to the very heart of His Being. Let us take three great words and briefly consider them—Creation, Revelation, Redemption.

1. *Creation.* "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Why, did He create? We cannot, of course, really answer the question, but it is not enough to say that He just chose to create. That makes His action arbitrary. Surely He created because He needed a universe to be the expression of His nature and

purpose. It is His nature to go out of Himself in creating, to call into being worlds and systems of worlds which may reflect His glory and afford a field for His activity. Now, if that is so, it would appear that we must think of creation as an eternal act. In other words, there was never a time when God had not a universe as the medium of His self-expression. Our solar system had a beginning and will have an ending; but why should there not have been an unending succession of universes? Why should not we be living in one phase of an endless process, in which system has succeeded to system in orderly evolution? Astronomy has taught us that worlds are born, pass through a history, and then are resolved again into nebulous matter, which subsequently enters into fresh conbinations. It is difficult to think of God beginning to create at a certain moment of time. What moved Him to create then? If He needed then a universe, must He not always have needed one? To many the thought of unending creation is very helpful. It seems to throw some light on the problem of the vastness of the stellar universe. Why are there vast spaces, these millions

of suns in all stages of development? The mind reels at these immensities, and we wonder sometimes whether the history of our petty planet has the significance which we give it. But if from all eternity God has been creating and pouring out the wealth of His nature in universe after universe, then I am content to believe that there is a meaning in the whole, and to cling to my conviction that this planet has its place in the general scheme. The more closely I can relate creation to the nature of God, seeing in it a necessitated self-expression of His Being, the more sure can I be that the little world on which I live has come from the very depths of that Being. Unending creation does not imply that matter is self-existent. There have been dualistic systems of thought which made matter eternal in its own right, standing ever against God as a kind of rival. The doctrine of creation out of nothing, which is the thought which most naturally occurs to the mind when creation is mentioned, was a needed protest against such dualism. Matter may be as eternal as God, and yet owe its origin to His will. Even if He eternally creates matter,

He is the Creator, and matter is His instrument.

2. *Revelation.* To reveal Himself belongs equally to the nature of God. "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour," cries the unknown prophet of the exile (Isaiah xlv. 15), and "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing," says the Book of Proverbs (xxv. 2). But the expressions are merely reminders that God's ways cannot be completely fathomed by men, and that there are mysteries of His Being which baffle us. They serve to bring out more clearly the fact that we have some sure knowledge of God, which is ours because He has revealed Himself. If the process of creation has resulted in the appearance of persons, with the capacity for knowing God and the desire to know Him and enter into fellowship with Him, it is not unreasonable to assume that God would wish to reveal Himself to beings who share His own spiritual nature. One of the characteristics of spirit is that it is essentially self-revealing. A spirit is active towards its environment, and its activity is most intense and most full of meaning when its environment consists of

other spirits. The Christian believes that God's purpose in creating was the formation of a kingdom of moral and spiritual personalities with whom He might hold fellowship. But in order that such a purpose might be carried out it was necessary that God should reveal Himself to the members of this kingdom. The Bible, at any rate, has no doubt about the matter. It claims to be the record of a special revelation given gradually to a chosen people. It pictures God as communicating truth to man, educating him, unfolding to him His own character, and doing all this not capriciously, but because He was of such a nature that He must do it.

Now we may use the word 'revelation' in a wider or a narrower sense. We may speak of the universe as the revelation of God, because we learn about God from His works. Through them God is expressing Himself. And we may speak of what man discovers by the use of his mind as a revelation, because the human mind comes from God, and God uses it as His instrument. If God is the Being "in whom we live and move," if His Spirit is always operative in the universe, then it is impossible to say

that He is not concerned in what we call human discovery. So that we must think of God as always and everywhere trying to teach men, trying to reveal Himself. The missionary, for example, will look for the elements of truth in the religion of the heathen to whom he goes, and upon them will build his larger truth. He will realize that there must be some true knowledge of God, however dim, in heathen faiths, because God has never left Himself without witness among men. This is the larger use of the word 'revelation.' The narrower use of the word relates to the special revelation given to the Hebrews, and later to the whole world in Jesus Christ. We shall discuss this in a subsequent chapter. Here it will suffice to point out that the problem is how to account for the facts adequately, except on the hypothesis of some special action of God. How was it that, alone among contemporary nations, the Hebrews reached the conception of God found in the prophets, which is the basis of all our modern theism? Their own religious writers unhesitatingly spoke of a special revelation which was given to their race. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but

the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever." "The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the peoples that are upon the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy vii. 6). And how are we to explain Jesus Christ and His abiding influence, and His appearance on the field of history in close connexion with the spiritual movement which had preceded Him, if we refuse to make use of the idea of revelation?

3. *Redemption.* Here, surely, we have the best illustration of the truth that the activities of God proceed from His character by what we may paradoxically call a free necessity. The thought of God as Redeemer rests upon the deeper thought of Him as Love. In the Old Testament, particularly in such prophets as Hosea, Jeremiah, and Second Isaiah, love and tenderness, the love which forgives and the tenderness which yearns over human failure, are portrayed as qualities which belong essentially to God. But it was Jesus Christ who taught that love was the supreme characteristic of God. He was a Father, and He had all a Father's love and care for His human children.

Now what does love mean? What are the marks of love? We too often use the word in a vague way to express a thin sentiment or an emotion of a rather feeble nature. We forget that love at its best is a passion of self-sacrifice, a power which makes for fellowship, the highest expression of a personality which seeks to find fulfilment for itself in multiplying ties of spiritual relationship with other personalities. Love is an energy of self-giving. In its very nature it is redemptive, for it seeks the highest good of others. Love ceases to be love if it is not active; sacrifice and self-surrender are the very breath of its life.

> The vine from every living limb bleeds wine:
> Is it the poorer for that spirit shed?
> The drunkard and the wanton drink thereof:
> Are they the richer for that gift's excess?
> Measure thy life by loss instead of gain,
> Not by the wine drunk, but the wine poured forth.
> For love's strength standeth in love's sacrifice,
> And whoso suffers most hath most to give. [1]

Now, if God is Love, must He not of necessity be a Redeemer? His love goes out of itself in creation; to make a universe that He may pour out His love upon it

1. *The Disciples*, by Mrs. Hamilton King.

belongs to His very Being. But His is a Holy love; and so when man misuses his freedom and sin infects humanity with its poison, God sets on foot a redemptive process, which culminates in the Cross of Christ, where Christianity bids us see the divine love going to the extreme of self-sacrifice, that men may be won back to fellowship with their Father. The Cross was no afterthought on the part of God, a desperate remedy to retrieve a ruined world. The Cross represents the heart of God. In His life there is always a cross, for an Eternal Love must move ever within the circle of self-sacrifice. "Love's strength standeth in love's sacrifice."

Such a thought of God as we have been considering has many results for our practical life of duty and prayer and service, which may be summarized in some such way as the following. "God wants to make Himself known to me, to give Himself to me. He is seeking to enter into close relationship with me. It is His nature to do this. What remains for me to do, is to fit myself to receive all that I can of His fullness, and to make myself a channel through which His life may flow into me, and pass through me into

others. What am I doing to hinder this self-giving of God from being effective either in myself or in the world? Am I in any way thwarting the divine purpose?"

Chapter VI *Man the Mirror of God*

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him ?—

St. Matthew vii. 11.

Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same.—

Hebrews ii. 14.

In the case of anything which grows or develops we naturally look to the final stages of the development to discover its meaning. A seed gives us no idea of the plant which it will become; but when the plant is there, we can look back on the whole process of its growth and see a purpose and meaning in it all. The key, then, to any development is to be found, not in its beginning, but in its end and in the movement towards that end. Applying this principle to the long evolution of this earth on which we live, we shall in our search

for the meaning of the evolution fix upon the later stages of the process as containing the answer to our enquiry. In other words we shall not, as the materialist does, say that in matter is to be found the secret of the whole process; nor shall we be content to think of life (whatever life may be) as giving the full significance of the evolution; but we shall definitely go to personality, and to the spiritual characteristics which are the marks of personality, as that which will best interpret for us the meaning of the development. The plain fact confronts us that the course of evolution has resulted in the appearance of man, and we have to ask the question why this is so. Why should evolution have moved in this direction? We cannot treat a human being as if he were nothing more than a collection of material particles. From one point of view he is that; but this view of him leaves out of account just those characteristics which make him man. When we speak of a man, we mean a person with those spiritual qualities and activities which belong to personality. Now just because evolution has taken this upward direction, we are justified in maintaining that, if it has any

meaning at all, that meaning is to be found in personality. In a word, God's purpose in creating has to do with the development of a society of personal beings. It is a spiritual purpose.

In reading back to the nature of God from the evidences of God's handiwork which we see around us we are forced to endow Him with many attributes. We speak of Him as powerful, wise, majestic, omniscient, and the like. But two people may give the same list of attributes to God, and yet may have very differing conceptions of God, because they do not agree as to the attributes which should be specially emphasized. Different views of God are to some extent inevitable even among Christians, because our thought of God is coloured by our education, our social atmosphere, our whole complex environment. But it is worth while to enquire what are the divine attributes to which we should pay special attention, if we would reach the truest thought of God. Can there be any doubt that they are those which we find in ourselves as personal beings, those which are most characteristic of the make-up of a human personality ? Here, again, there may be some dispute as to what qualities are

most characteristic of human personality; but I suppose all would agree that neither power, nor wisdom, are the pre-eminent qualities of a man; nor majesty, nor any of those attributes which emphasize the transcendent greatness of God. What is specifically the mark of man is his moral nature, his capacity for love and fellowship, his recognition of the call of duty his striving after an ideal of moral goodness.

In speaking of reaching the truest thought of God we clearly imply that we are in possession of some criterion or standard by which we may distinguish between the true and the false, or between the different degrees of truth. What is this criterion? In one sense it cannot be defined with precision, because our thought of God is always growing; in another sense for the Christian at any rate it is a fixed standard, because he believes that God has given a supreme revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. The Christian, then, would say that our thought of God must correspond to the mind of Christ about God, but with the very important proviso that our understanding of that mind is never complete. Under the guidance of the Spirit of God

Christians are being continually led on into a fuller appreciation of the mind of Christ. But, though this is so, and though the fact must be emphasized, it remains true that the teaching of Christ about God is that from which we start in our endeavour to understand Him. And in that teaching it is clear where the emphasis lies, as the word 'Father' proves. Jesus deliberately selected a word charged with the associations of human family life as His name for God. 'Father,' where the home is good, calls up in the child's mind ideas of love, care, personal interest, sympathy, trust, fellowship. Jesus bade us think of God in that way as a Father with a heart of love for His human children; and of ourselves as brothers in one great human family. Further, for the Christian God is revealed in Jesus Himself. Jesus is God in human form and under the limitations imposed by a real human nature. "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same." "Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men" (Philippians ii.

6, 7). Whatever else, then, it may be true to say about God, it is certainly true for the Christian to say 'God is like Jesus.' Jesus is the perfect mirror of God, and human beings are mirrors of God in proportion as they share the mind of Jesus, and live their lives in His spirit and under the governance of His standards.

Now if God's nature is what Jesus described it to be, and if His purpose is the spiritual purpose of moulding humanity into the likeness of Jesus Christ, which is His own likeness, we shall best further that purpose and grow into clearest understanding of His Being by developing in our lives the moral qualities which Jesus said that God possessed. In particular, if the essence of the divine nature is love, it is love which we must show in our lives. But it is at this point that so many who call themselves Christians fail. It is not that they from time to time commit breaches of the law of love. There can be very few who do not sometimes lose their tempers or say a bitter word. But they do not seem to realize that God is calling them to be instruments of a purpose whose very heart is the creation of a temper of loving fellowship throughout humanity.

The truly Christian spirit is one which cannot rest until an atmosphere of love and fellowship pervades the whole of human life in its manifold activities and manifestations. The home, the workshop, the market, politics domestic and international, the entire social order in all its aspects, must be made spheres in which the spirit of love is vitally operative.

Let us take two obvious illustrations. Why is it that so many professing Christians decry the League of Nations ? Many answers might be given to that question. Here are some of them. "You will never get rid of war," says one objector, "so long as human nature remains what it is ; to fight is a deep-rooted instinct of mankind." That is true ; but Christianity is a religion which proclaims that human nature can be changed by God, and that it is God's purpose so to change it. It sets up a new scale of values in which brotherhood and fellowship stand at the top of the list, and says that in Jesus Christ resides the power to shape men into the new temper which expresses those values. The best way to promote war is to say that war is unavoidable. Our objector has clearly never related his philosophy of life to the

Christian thought of God; and that means that he has never grasped the implications of the assertion that God is Love. "The League of Nations," says another, "is a mischievous attempt to upset a plain principle in God's government of the world, the principle of nationality. God intended that there should be different nations with different languages, cultures and ideals. The presence of these differences gives richness to the world, whose progress is best achieved by allowing free play to these differences, even though war sometimes result." But are the differences between nations greater than the resemblances? Is not the fundamental identity in human nature, wherever it is found, the most striking thing about it? And has not the development of civilization been increasingly along the line of a sharing of all those spiritual values connected with science, art, literature, which constitute the most important and abiding part of human achievement? If an effective League of Nations came into being, national differences would not be abolished. They would remain, but would be focussed against a background of universal human brotherhood, and universal spiritual values. Time would be given for

passion to subside and for reason to assert its judgment. In the pause, when the fire and the earthquake had passed, the " still, small voice " of fellowship, which is the voice of God, would be heard. Our second objector has never grasped the meaning of St. Paul's words, " where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman : but Christ is all, and in all " (Colossians iii. 11).

A third class of objection to the League is of a more profound kind, and is compatible with a real sympathy for its principle and aims. The Principal of Manchester College, Oxford, has, in two striking books recently published, [1] called attention to the difference between a "political" and a "cultural" civilization. European civilization is of the "political " type ; it has its traditional machinery of diplomacy and government, of armies and navies, and alliances ; and is ruled in international affairs by conceptions of national self-interest, the balance of power, and the like. The structure of the League of Nations inevitably reflects this " political " type of civilization, and therein lies its present

1. *A Living Universe*, and *Realities and Shams*, by L. P. Jacks.

weakness. But behind the outward form of the League stands the ideal of human brotherhood, which should receive the warm support of every Christian. To stop war is but a stage in the entire re-ordering of the life of humanity. What is wanted is a new spiritual orientation of the mind of the nations. "The League of Nations, in our view of it, is not an extended version of national government; it is not, as patriotism likes to think, the British Empire writ large; it is not a scheme of law, order and police blown out to international proportions. It is a different type of association, demanding new ideas, new habits of thought, new lines of action, and, above all, new *men*. It is a great experiment in humanism, requiring for its service humanists who have retained their humanism unwarped by electioneering and diplomacy. We dream of the League as an instrument for organizing the nations on the lines of the *things which matter most in human life*, to be guided by men who have proved their wisdom in the understanding of these things."[1]

To quote the same writer once again; "We need *a league of ideas* to furnish the

1. *Realities and Shams*, p. 64.

League of Nations with aim, spirit, and form."[1] The followers of Jesus should see in the League a genuine attempt to Christianize international relations, an opportunity for showing in the international field that spirit of fellowship and that appreciation of spiritual values which are the means by which the life of God flows out upon the world.

Take, again, the attitude of indifference shown by so many Christians to the problems of the organization of our social and economic life. A vast number of people simply do not care how their neighbours live; they are interested only in the affairs of their own small circle. They have never asked themselves the old question, "And who is my neighbour?" Very few can become experts in these difficult matters, but all can show the Christian readiness to try to understand and sympathize. Is it, or is it not, God's will that everyone of His children should have the opportunity to lead a full, human life? Is it not an obvious fact that thousands have at present no such chance? It is a matter for thankfulness that interest in these things is rapidly growing; that an increasing number of people are determined

1. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

to reorganize, not necessarily by the way of socialism, our social and industrial fabric, and to infuse into it a new temper. What is wanted is a fresh vision of human life in the light of the revelation of God's nature brought by Jesus Christ. The psalmist took his difficulty about the prosperity of the wicked into the sanctuary, when he was sorely puzzled over it, and there received help.[1] We have to learn that only "in thy light shall we see light." But *there* we shall see it. We shall discover what are the true values, how selfishness is the contradiction of God's purpose for us, how in God's eyes every human being is of inestimable worth.

The ultimate problem is one of men, and not of machinery, of character, not of outward conditions. Most of our social and economic difficulties would vanish if we were all real Christians. Sin, in one or other of its manifold forms, is the cause of much of our trouble, and sin cannot be cured by legislation. But outward conditions do react on character, just as the plant grows up sickly, which is kept without proper light or air. Hence there is constant need for action by the State in the interest of the character

1. Psalm lxxiii. 17.

of its citizens. But far more potent than anything which the State can do is the power of a really Christian public opinion, and to the formation of that we can all contribute. The start, however, must be made at home, with ourselves, our own characters and aims and interests. We must ask ourselves how far we are showing that spirit of love and fellowship which is the life of God in the soul.

Man is the mirror of God only when he is striving to become something better than he is. At all times the mirror is blurred by sin and ignorance ; yet the image of God in man is never completely obscured ; and it increases in brightness in proportion as we resolutely set ourselves to live after the pattern of Jesus Christ. The divine discontent of the soul, when it compares its achievement with its possibilities, is the Spirit of God at work in humanity. And He too strives to overcome human resistance. His is a creative strife which can know no ending until there is no more sin or selfishness to hamper His work. Reality can be interpreted in many ways ; one of the truest ways, because it is true to the essential meaning of human personality, is to think

of it as a spiritual process. Something is going on all the time which has spiritual meaning. Characters are being made or marred. A divine purpose is being helped or hindered. A fierce fight is raging between good and evil. God is in the thick of the strife. He calls on us to help Him. He has revealed His nature in Jesus Christ. "I am love; I am the spirit of fellowship. I seek to make that spirit permeate humanity." That is the revelation of the divine character and purpose. What is our attitude to it?

Chapter VII *The Divine Transcendence*

For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth; the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name.—AMOS iv. 13.

Who only hath immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable; whom no man hath seen, nor can see; to whom be honour and power eternal.—I. TIMOTHY vi. 16.

IN emphasizing those qualities in God which are reflected in man and point to a real kinship between the human and the divine, we must not forget how infinitely God transcends all that is best and highest in ourselves. There is, perhaps, some danger to-day that we may do this; that in our desire to humanize God and make Him partner in our struggles, we may fail to give due weight to that side of His Being which we describe under such terms as majesty, perfection, transcendence. Let us think about this, and see how our life of practical

religion is affected by the thought of the divine transcendence.

First, we must settle what we mean by transcendence. We may dismiss at once all ideas of physical distance, of a God remote from earth in some far-away heaven. That kind of thought belongs to an earlier period in human civilization, when science had not revealed the immensity of the physical universe and reflection had not shown the inadequacy of much of our picture-thinking about God. God is not transcendent because He is distant; He is transcendent because He is the Source and Ground of the universe and the goal of its movement. We may think of Him as transcendent in two ways: (*a*) He is Creator. The universe owes its origin to His will, and depends upon Him at every moment for its continuance; (*b*) He is ethically transcendent. That is, our moral ideals, the high ends after which we strive, all that we sum up under the words, Beauty, Truth, Goodness, are eternally realized in Him. He is the perfection of all that we think excellent. He planted in us aspirations after goodness because He Himself is good. In Him, as we believe, our struggles after holiness and nobility of character will

one day issue in victory. He is drawing humanity upward to Himself. We are not chasing phantoms when we pursue spiritual ends, but are yielding ourselves to the inspiration of the Spirit of Him from whom all spiritual influences proceed. "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Included under the general thought of God's transcendence are the conceptions of His Omnipresence, Omniscience, and Omnipotence. He is, we say, Omnipresent. What we mean by that is, that all things and all persons are always present to Him. Because we are compelled to think in terms of space we naturally speak of Him as being everywhere. But we cannot apply strictly spacial terms to spirit; it is better therefore to think of God as having at each moment the universe and all its contents present to His consciousness, so that nothing anywhere can escape His notice. "There is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews iv. 13). By the divine Omniscience we mean that God knows all things, reads all hearts, takes cognizance of

all that happens. Does He know in advance what is going to happen in the case of a human being who is free to choose His line of action? Does God foresee now what I shall do when alternative choices are presented to me a year hence? We cannot reasonably hold that God does not foresee the main lines which history will pursue, or the great decisive events which will determine its course; but if He has given men freedom, it may well be that part of the self-limitation of God which that gift involves is, that He does not foresee all the details of human action. The problem is too difficult for discussion here; nor does it closely concern us; for what we are investigating is the bearing upon our religious life of the general idea of God's transcendence. His Omniscience, whatever it may mean in regard to my future action, certainly means in regard to the things which I am now doing or have done in the past, that He knows all about them—a thought, surely, full of tremendous significance.

More important and more interesting is the problem of the Omnipotence of God. Omnipotence, taken in its strict meaning, means the power to do anything, and

the popular, unreflective mind certainly tends to credit God with such power. But a God who can do anything, to whose power there is no limit, has little value for the religious needs of man; for if He can do anything, He might at any moment call evil good, and good evil. Clearly, whatever God's power may be, it must flow from His character; so that we cannot think of Him as being able to contradict that character and thus deny His own nature. We reach our real difficulties, however, when we think about the facts of moral evil and suffering. During the recent war, when Europe was a veritable shambles and suffering on a wide scale was rampant, many were asking the question why God allowed this state of things to continue. Had He lost control of the world? Was He powerless to intervene? If He had the power, why did He not exercise it? Such answer as we can give to this problem must depend upon the view we take of the meaning and purpose of human life. If the end of life is pleasure, if we are here to "have a good time," then we can conceive of a world far better adapted for that purpose than the one in which we live; and we may reasonably bring an

indictment against God on the ground that He has failed in His plan, and has not created a world suited to produce the maximum of pleasure. But if the purpose of human life is deeper, if it has to do with the formation in human beings of character, if the world process is moving, as we believe it is moving, to a spiritual end, then it may well be that the execution of that purpose imposes limits upon the power of God.

Morality is not morality unless it is the result of a man's free choice. You may tie a thief's hands, so that he cannot steal; but you have not thereby made him an honest man. He becomes honest only when he voluntarily gives up stealing and chooses to pursue the opposite road. The condition, therefore, of there being any such thing as morality at all is that men are given at least a measure of freedom to choose their line of action. But the possession by man of freedom of necessity implies a limitation on the power of God. If God has really given me my freedom, then He has so far limited His own freedom, because He has entrusted me with a power which I may use in defiance of His will. This limitation of God is not imposed on Him from any outside source.

It is a self-limitation. God, having in mind the purpose of creating a kingdom of moral personalities, could carry out that purpose only by giving freedom to men; for unless we are free we are not capable of morality. But in creating men free He voluntarily surrendered to them part of His own power; and He cannot take away the freedom He has given without at once reducing men to machines, and thereby defeating His purpose of creating gradually a society of responsible moral beings.

The Omnipotence of God, then, cannot possibly mean that He can do anything. Whatever we mean by divine Omnipotence must be compatible with the fact of human freedom and the limitation of God which flows from that fact. What we men and women, struggling with temptation, beset at times with doubt, baffled by a hundred mysteries, want to be assured of is that God can be trusted, that His purpose will not fail, that the final issue will be the triumph of goodness. And the doctrine of God's Omnipotence means that; it means that, in the long run, God will win, that He has not lost control of the universe, but is guiding it to its appointed end, that He overrules

evil and out of evil brings good. That God is Omnipotent in this sense we cannot prove; in the last resort it is a matter of faith. But for the Christian there is an anticipatory pledge of the final triumph of God in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. There we see defeat turned into victory, just when all seemed darkest; seeming weakness proving itself to be strength; good, not only triumphing over evil, but using evil as the material out of which it fashioned its own advance. In hours of despair or uncertainty we fall back upon that historic achievement, and renew our trust in God.

But let us observe what such a thought of the divine Omnipotence implies. It means that man is co-partner with God in the carrying out of the divine purpose. We cannot finally defeat God's plan, but we can delay it. If Europe to-morrow deliberately threw over belief in Christianity and became atheistic, the execution of God's plan would be hindered. God would have to select other instruments to carry His plan through. In a very real sense we may speak of God as struggling to execute His purpose. He needs men as His agents,

but He is continually being thwarted by men. We by our sinning and our want of faith are perpetually erecting barriers against the movement of His Spirit, who seeks to enter our lives that He may make us "fellow-workers with God." God must suffer because of the resistance we offer. Yet He waits patiently using love's methods of appeal and persuasion, trying all ways save that of force, so that He may win men over to Himself. We hear much to-day about the "Comrade" God, who shares the burdens of human life, and calls on men to help Him. The God of Christianity is a "Comrade" God, but He is not, as some modern teaching affirms, in danger of defeat. Our whole anchorage is gone if the triumph of goodness is not sure. Divine Omnipotence means that in the end God will win; but the length of the road to the end depends on the nature of the response we make to the divine challenge. The road may pass through war and strife, through class-hatreds and revolutions and all the disasters which sin and selfishness bring in their train; and then it will be a long road of pain and tragedy. Or the road may run more smoothly through quiet fields, bright with

flowers, its travellers journeying as brothers to the spiritual city of their desire; and then, surely, it will be a shorter road, a *via sacra*, hallowed by the footsteps of God Himself.

The Bible is full of the thought of God's majesty and sublimity, of "the glory of the Lord," of His transcendent greatness. It calls upon men to humble themselves in His presence and to approach Him with awe and reverence. Our sense of His transcendence should be all the greater because the telescope and the photographic plate have revealed the immensity of the universe, and the microscope has shown the intricate skill of His creative power. But is it greater? Are we not in danger of losing some of this sense because life has grown so full of material interests? We do not give ourselves time to think and wonder, or to cultivate the emotions of awe and reverence, which are a very real part of living religion. How dull and listless at times is our worship! Many of us have almost forgotten, if we had ever learned, how to adore. We rightly insist that right conduct, the doing of God's will in daily life, is the heart of religion; but we make the mistake

of thinking that it is the whole of it. People differ greatly in their capacity for worship and wonder; yet the capacity is there in germ in everyone and can be trained and developed. We ought to try to develop it, partly because religion is a matter for the whole personality, and we ought not to grow up one-sided; partly because the cultivation of this capacity will prove of enormous assistance to us in our efforts to live the right life. It is the general atmosphere of a life which counts, its sense of values, its living familiarity with things divine. The man who has educated his sense of God, to whom the Living God is really a Presence about his life, who has found Him on his knees, or in the lonely place of Nature, or in some shrine hallowed by worship, will have a reserve of strength upon which he can draw in the hour of temptation. There can be no better way in which to cultivate this sense of the divine transcendence than reverently to study some of the passages in the Bible, and particularly in the prophets, which describe the experience that came to men of flesh and blood like ourselves, either in vision, or in moments of conscious apprehension, when the reality and majesty of

God burst upon their souls. Those who like poetry and are prepared to take a little trouble to enter into the mind of a thoughtful poet will find the study of Wordsworth a help. In his poetical autobiography *The Prelude*, which tells the story of the growth of his mind and character, we see his native instinct of wonder and reverence developing through communion with Nature into a spiritual insight of rare, penetrative power. We cannot all be Wordsworths ; but he and many another poet can teach us to see the infinite in things, and so can help us to draw near to God.

The New Testament reveals the transcendent God as the God of love, who has entered into closest relations with men by coming as their Redeemer in human form. It is possible so to emphasize the love of God as to lose sight of the sterner and more awe-full elements of His character. There can be no question that we to-day are in peril of minimizing the gravity of sin, and of forgetting that sin is utterly abhorrent to God, and that He would be contradicting His own essential nature if He did not deal with the unrepentant sinner by way of judgment and punishment, whatever form

that discipline may take. There is in God a transcendent moral quality which reacts against sin with severity. The Bible emphasizes this again and again. "Our God is a consuming fire"; "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto each one of you according to your works." Passages like these abound in Scripture. When Isaiah saw the vision of God in His majesty, and heard the song of the seraphim "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts," the realization of his own unworthiness came upon him in a flash. "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (vi. 5). And when the divine voice came to Job out of the whirlwind, and God showed him the panorama of creation and the infinite variety of the living forms which He had made, the sense of the transcendent greatness of God overwhelmed him, and he could only confess, "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee, Wherefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes" (xlii. 5, 6).

We cannot afford to lose sight of this

transcendent element in God, His power and majesty, and above all His holiness and hatred of sin. For it is that vision of God which gives us the measure of ourselves. No man can really know himself unless he sees himself in the light of God. We must come into that revealing Presence, cost what it may of shame and abasement, if we would see ourselves as we are, and as God would have us become.

Chapter VIII The Revelation of God in Jesus Christ

God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son.—

HEBREWS i. 1, 2.

Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.—

II. CORINTHIANS iv. 6.

WE have seen that it belongs to the nature of God to reveal Himself, and that this revelation takes many forms. God expresses Himself in the order and beauty of the natural world, in the mind of man, in the stirrings of conscience, and in all those movements of the spiritual heart of humanity which make men feel that they belong to eternity as well as time. As we survey the process of evolution we see that this revelation is progressive. More of God is revealed in the later stages of the development

than in the earlier. The process is crowned by the appearance of personality. A person at his best, a person striving to be true to his highest possibilities is the clearest index of the character of God.

But within this larger revelation is, so the Christian believes, a revelation of a more special kind, connected with a particular people, the Hebrews, and with a particular historical figure, Jesus Christ. "God," says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son." There was a preparatory movement followed by a climax. There was an earlier revelation given through persons and through the events of a nation's history, which led up to a fuller revelation given through a Perfect Person. Has modern criticism rendered that traditional belief untenable? Is the belief incongruous with what we know about this earth and its history? Surely not; on the contrary, the Christian belief, viewed in its broad outlines, harmonizes wonderfully with what we know of God's general method of operation. If all the lower stages of

evolution have led up to the appearance of personality, and if personality is always "in the making," with capacities for future growth to which we can set no limit, a revelation of God in and through a Perfect Person would not seem unreasonable. Again, if we grant that there was a special revelation, we can see, as we study the Bible which records that revelation, that it was not made all at once, but was progressive.

Nature climbed by stages from the inorganic to man. The Hebrews were led by stages from more primitive conceptions of God to that thought of God in the prophets which is the basis of our modern theism.

We are confronted with certain facts, which call for an explanation. The facts, briefly put, are these. We find a certain nation developing a religious consciousness and a religious experience of a very remarkable kind. Their religious teachers reach a conception of God which in purity and spirituality goes immeasurably beyond any thought of God reached by other contemporary nations. So striking is their conception of God as set forth in the writings of the prophets of the nation, that the modern

world has accepted it as the foundation on which it builds its own theology. What explanation can be given of this fact? To say that the Hebrews had a genius for religion, as the Greeks had a genius for sculpture, only puts the problem a stage further back, because we want to know why this one race had this genius. Nor does that explanation account for the peculiar religious consciousness of this people. They said that God was specially teaching them; they used the word 'revelation' to account for their knowledge of God. Were they the victims of a vast self-deception which persisted through centuries of their history? If you concede the existence of a God who can fairly be described in personal terms, a God who is carrying out a purpose, or many purposes, in the universe, can you deny Him the power to select a special race to be the channel through which a revelation should be given, clearer in kind than the revelation of Himself given in other nations? Selective action is characteristic of human personality; is it to be denied to God? There are many difficulties connected with the idea of a special revelation; but so remarkable was the religious

achievement of the Hebrews that we cannot dispense with the thought, if we are to attempt any explanation at all of Hebrew religion.

But there is another fact connected with the religious experience of this race which is even more striking. Hebrew religion looked forward; it was a religion of expectation. This note of hope and expectancy sounds out most clearly in the prophets. It was not given to the prophets to predict in detail a distant future, nor had any of them a vision of Jesus Christ; but it was given to them to proclaim the coming, through the redemptive action of God, of a kingdom of love and peace and righteousness; and to some of them to see an ideal figure, whom they named Messiah, as ruler of that kingdom, in whom the gracious purposes of God should be gathered up and consummated. We trace the Messianic hope growing through the centuries like a living organism. We see each prophet painting his picture of the future in his own colours, some with a coarser, some with a finer brush. And then, after an interval, comes One who marvellously fulfils this earlier expectation, in whom many lines from the past meet, who gathers

up in Himself the kingly, priestly, and redemptive functions which the prophets had assigned to the coming Messiah. The spiritual heart of Messianic prophecy finds its consummation in the Person and work of Jesus. We cannot always detect purpose in history, because the scale of its processes is too vast; but here we, looking back on this earlier prophetic movement in the light of the fulfilment which it received in Christ, are confronted with something, which we can describe only as planned or designed.

It has been wisely said that while in Hebrew prophecy there is a tendency towards Christ, there is no tendency to produce Him. In other words, Christ is too great, too original a figure to be explained merely by the past. Attempts have been made to show that in the Gospels we have an idealized construction of His Person designed to make it correspond with the Messianic hope; and that, because Jesus thought of Himself as Messiah, it was natural that those who wrote His life should "write it up" in Messianic terms. The futility of these attempts is patent. In the first place, though it is true that Jesus thought of Himself as Messiah, He filled

Messiahship with a new meaning. A Messiah who was to suffer and be crucified was not the Messiah for whom the Jews were looking. There is no evidence that the Jews of the day ever applied to the Messiah the passages about the Suffering Servant in Second Isaiah. But Jesus adopted as His own the rôle of the Suffering Servant, thereby cutting right across the current Messianic expectation. In the second place, though He claimed to fulfil the past, He treated it with sovereign freedom; setting aside the Mosaic law in the interests of a higher morality, selecting from the past of prophecy those abiding spiritual elements which conformed to His conception of Himself and His work. In the third place, this ideal construction theory breaks down when it is brought face to face with the facts. Does the narrative in the first three Gospels read as if it were the work of writers who were inventing? Surely, there is about it a naturalness, a sincerity, which makes us feel that we have here a trustworthy record, and a faithful portrait. Criticism has shown that the ideal element in the story is small, particularly in St. Mark and St. Luke. Each writer certainly selects his

incidents to suit his purpose, but selection does not imply invention. And what of the Resurrection, the Ascension, and Pentecost? In estimating the greatness and originality of Jesus we have to take into account His abiding influence upon humanity, the results which have flowed from His life. The early Church certainly believed that He had risen from the dead, and their missionaries went out to preach that good news. At Pentecost, explain it how you will, a new experience of life and power came to the Church, a new energy, which these first Christians interpreted as meaning that Jesus was still alive and through His Spirit giving life to men. The whole of Christian experience is a commentary upon the amazing personality of Jesus; and, unless we are to set it all aside as delusion, we have to admit that no attempts to explain away the general impression which we receive from a study of His character in the Gospels, that here was One who can be construed only in terms of Godhead, are successful.

Christian faith has always given to Jesus the value of God. It has found in Him the supreme revelation of the character of God. In Christian experience He is central,

both as claiming our complete loyalty, and giving us power to be loyal. But faith has not stopped here. It has gone further, and affirmed that, corresponding to the value, is a fact. It has said, "Jesus is God." In other words, the heart of Christianity is the belief that God completed His earlier revelation by Himself taking our human nature and coming as a Man among men to redeem mankind. It was a real human nature which He assumed. God truly be-became Man, accepting whatever limitations of Deity a true manhood might involve. God entered into history in the Person of Jesus Christ. Moved by love for men, wishing to help them, wishing to give them a supreme revelation of Himself through the highest medium available, that of personality, God Himself, and no less a Being, became a human person. This is what Christianity affirms.

Think of the wonder of such a revelation! That God in love for men should stoop to become man is the most amazing fact in the universe. But note how the wonder fades from the revelation, if we take any lower estimate of Jesus. Some would have us believe that Jesus was a man selected

by God for a redemptive work, and specially endowed with the Spirit for His task. Such a view misses the very meaning and heart of the revelation. There is all the difference in the world between saying that God selected one of human race to be His agent in redemption, and saying that God came Himself into human life. The one view teaches indeed that God is Love, but the other shows us a Love so profound and tender that it stoops to bear the burden of human sin and suffering. How different, again, is the meaning we attach to the word 'Saviour' on the rival views! "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save?" (Isaiah lxiii. 1). On the theory that Christ was a specially endowed man can we say with confidence that he is "mighty to save"? May there not be limits to his power? Can we be sure that he will win in the end? The heart asks itself these questions. It knows the kind of Saviour it wants; one who can be utterly trusted, because He is in Himself the very love of God. The men

who drew up the Creeds, who were trying to find language in which to define Christ's Person, kept ever before them the facts of Christian experience which gathered round the great words 'redemption' and 'salvation.' They knew the change which Christ had wrought in human life, the power which flowed from Him, how He had proved Himself a veritable Redeemer to countless souls, and they saw that no definition of His Person in terms lower than those of Godhead was adequate. Those who have experienced Christ's power, who have entered even a little way into the meaning of the Cross, and felt the compelling force of His Person, will unhesitatingly say with St. Thomas, "my Lord and my God."

This redemptive act of God by which He Himself became man challenges us from many sides and in many ways. Some of these ways we shall consider later. Here let us take one aspect of the challenge, its call to us to consider the value of our own personality. The fact of the Incarnation emphasizes the sacredness of human nature both on its physical and spiritual side. Body and soul form a marvellous unity, and Christ came as the Redeemer

of both. The spirit in man should have the primacy; the body should be the willing instrument of the spirit. Misuse of the body by neglect, for instance, of the laws of health, is an invasion of the sacredness of personality. And so the call comes to us to think highly of ourselves, to think of ourselves as God's sons, as sharers in a human nature which Christ has for ever consecrated. Such high thought of ourselves has nothing to do with conceit. When we see ourselves as we are seen in God's eyes, there is no room for conceit, but only for a profound humility. But it has to do with reverencing our personality, and with estimating ourselves as we may become. Sin is just the degrading of personality; it is a kind of sacrilege. It is a help in an hour of temptation to pause and ask, "Can I, being what I am, and wearing the human nature which Christ wore, do this?" True self-respect has as its corollary respect for the personality of others. "Never treat a human being as a means, but always as an end." This maxim of a great philosopher reminds us that, however low down a man may have sunk, he has an inner sanctuary of personality which must be reverenced.

The Christian motive of love really means such sympathetic respect for the inner self of a brother man as will issue in the desire to help him in the highest ways. That which underlies all our attempts to reform the social and economic order is the recognition of the sacredness of human personality. "The ministers of religion used to emphasize the sanctity of temples, shrines, the bones of saints, and holy relics. Now, however, religion will lay her hands on the real sanctity—human personality—and will fight with all the fierceness of the crusaders against its profanation."[1]

Christianity is extraordinarily truthful in its estimate of human nature. It does not make light of sin, or minimize the degradation of personality which sin involves; but while it faces clearly the facts, it also sees equally clearly the possibilities which lie open before any individual. What we may become under the stimulus of the new inspiration which Christ can give is the thought on which we should be constantly dwelling. Jesus always saw the best in men, and sought to elicit it. And how

1. *Twelve Tests of Character*, by H. E. Fosdick, p. 52.

St. Paul loves to dwell on the transforming power of Christ, that power which had remade himself and entirely changed the current of his own life. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans viii. 37) is the way in which he describes what Christ had done for Him.

Let us, then, think of ourselves as raw material which God can fashion into wondrous shapes of grace and beauty. Let us dwell on our possibilities of growth in character and service. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus Christ as the pattern after which we have to grow, remembering that He is power as well as pattern, and so can reinforce our trembling purpose. What may He not make of me if I yield myself to His influence? And always let us remember that our true self is the self which aspires, which sees the vision of higher things, which feels the restlessness of a divine discontent and reaches out after God. Personality is intrinsically sacred because it is the abiding-place of the Spirit of God.

Chapter IX *The Fatherhood of God*

That ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven.
—St. Matthew v. 45.

Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.—St. Matthew vi. 8.

God has been thought of and described in many ways, as Sovereign Lord or King, as Ruler of the Universe, as Creator, as Judge; and there is truth in all these descriptions. Each serves to bring out some attribute of His nature. But more comprehensive than any of them is the word which Jesus selected to describe God, the word 'Father.' Some of the symbolical language which we use about God tends to be outgrown as thought and knowledge advance; but the symbol of Fatherhood shows no signs of being outgrown.

On the contrary, it preserves its vitality and proves itself to be the conception of God which best meets the religious needs of

humanity. Why this is so we are to try to see in this chapter.

The thought of God as Father was not new. In classical literature Zeus is called the father of the gods and of men. And in the Old Testament the word is sometimes used of God, as, for instance, in such a passage as this, "For thou art our father, though Abraham knoweth us not, and Israel doth not acknowledge us: thou, O Lord, art our father; our redeemer from everlasting is thy name" (Isaiah lxiii. 16). The Hebrew nation is described as the child of God: "when Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hosea xi. 1) And the writer of Psalm ciii can say, "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." There are many passages both in the Psalms and the writings of the prophets (particularly in Hosea and Second Isaiah) which show that the thought of the divine love and tenderness and sympathy was familiar to these saints of Old Testament times. They spoke out of a genuine experience of God's love and care. They had proved that God was gracious and could be trusted. Yet, when we have taken all these facts into account,

it remains true that Jesus brought to the world a new revelation of God. He filled the word 'Father' with fresh meaning. Three things He did which gave it a new and rich significance. First, He taught in words, and by His own life, that love was of the very essence of God. Love was not one attribute among others of the divine nature, which might at times be displaced by the dominance of another quality; but it was this basal characteristic of God, that from which all His activities flowed, that which was the fundamental ground of all His qualities. Jesus led men into the very heart of God, and showed that heart beating with the passion of love. Secondly, Jesus brought the Father very near to men by exhibiting the love of God in operation in every day life and in the small details of life. God cared for the lilies and the birds, numbered the very hairs of our heads, loved little children, knew our needs before we told Him of them. Here was an all-embracing love for which words like great and small had no meaning. Here was an ever-present atmosphere which all men were always breathing, whether they recognized the fact or not. Thirdly, Jesus bid

men think of themselves as sons of the Father. He sought to bring them into personal relationship with God, into a relationship of friendship and intelligent sympathy. He said that the human soul was of great value in God's eyes, that every human being was a child of God; and that, just as a wise and good human father adapts his treatment of each of his children to the peculiar needs and temperament of that child, so the heavenly Father's love is selective, discriminating, individual. Men could trust God utterly because He was the perfection of love.

Jesus was able to present God in this way to the world, because He had experienced God in this way in His own life. At the root of His teaching about the Father lay His own filial consciousness. Into the secrets of that consciousness we cannot fully penetrate; but as we study His sayings and try to take the measure of His Personality, we become aware that He stood in a relation of peculiar intimacy with God, knew Himself to be the Son of God in a unique sense, and had an intuitive spiritual insight into the divine nature which enabled Him to speak about God with absolute conviction. Doctrine

about God is of course involved in His teaching; but to lay down theological propositions was not His main object. He sought rather to lead men into the experience of God which He Himself possessed. Let them live as if God was their Father; then they would grow into an understanding of His love and care. We must bask in the sunshine if we would know what sunshine is. We must live as sons, trustful and rejoicing in the Father's presence, if we would know what God is like. From Jesus Himself God's love radiated out upon men. He taught them by what He was and what He did more than by what He said. Can we wonder that "the common people heard him gladly"?[1]

Consider, now, how this thought of God's Fatherhood challenges our restlessness and anxiety. "Be not anxious for your life," said Jesus. The words as originally spoken referred to anxiety about food and raiment; but we need not so limit them.[2] Indeed,

1. Cf. *The Teaching of Jesus*, by D. M. Ross, ch. v, to which I am indebted for some suggestions.

2. St. Matthew vi. 25. The A.V. "Take no thought" conveys a wrong meaning. Jesus is not advocating reckless improvidence, but is seeking to dispel anxious fears.

to do so would be wrong, because Jesus meant to teach that the whole of life should be based on a quiet trust in the divine love. There are graver anxieties than anxieties about material things; yet for these, too, a trust in the Heavenly Father is a cure. How much of our living is spoiled by want of calmness! We wear ourselves out by worry. No doubt temperament counts here for much. A highly strung person is likely to be more anxious than a more phlegmatic one. But temperament has to be turned into character, nature has to be transformed by grace. We can cultivate calmness, and we ought deliberately to do so. If we do not, we go on being our own worst enemy. To suggest to ourselves that, come what may, we will try not to be ruffled or nervous or anxious is a real help. But the suggestion will carry with it far more weight if it takes the form of saying "my life is in the keeping of a Father of infinite love and wisdom; and hence there is no room for anxiety. What I do not know He knows. I can leave my cares entirely in His hands." Storms break upon every life. Occasions of anxiety come to all. The gravest of them are those which are

concerned with the welfare of those we love. We shall weather these storms, just in proportion as in the routine of ordinary life we have practised this trust in God. Here, surely, it is all-important to train children from the very first to know God as their Father. Let them be encouraged to tell Him anything they like; let them feel He is their Friend. You are laying in this way a foundation upon which later a full-grown Christian trust can be based.

The Fatherhood of God is not a demonstrable proposition. No one can prove it by logic, or to the satisfaction of another who doubts its truth. Each one must live it out in his own life, if he would know the doctrine to be true; and even then it will remain a matter of trust or faith. No thoughtful Christian will desire to minimize the difficulties in the way of accepting the doctrine. They confront us on every side. Perhaps the greatest of these difficulties are connected with the apparently haphazard incidence of suffering, and the presence of what we call 'laws' of Nature, that is, seemingly rigid uniformities in the operation of natural forces.

Why should A. have cancer and not B.?

Why should the breadwinner of a family be taken away when he is most wanted? The pestilence does not discriminate between its victims. The earthquake is no respecter of persons. Stubborn questionings inevitably arise in our minds. Is this, we ask, how a Father would act? We have to confess that we cannot solve the problem, but in facing it we must bear in mind certain considerations.

First, God in creating the universe created it on a fixed plan. There is an orderly system of Nature. Nature's forces do work uniformly, and at times man suffers from them. If Nature were not orderly, if this world were a scene of constant surprises, the steady education of man would be impossible. How could civilization advance, if Nature could not be trusted? The farmer would not trouble to sow his seed, unless there was a reasonable probability that it would ripen. We can only believe that God made the best possible universe, the one most adapted for the carrying out of His purpose. And we cannot expect Him to suspend the laws which govern the working of the whole system for our particular benefit. I am not denying that there may

be what are called 'special providences,' or that, in sickness for example, prayer may be the appointed means by which a cure may be effected. I am only suggesting that, before we bring an indictment against God, we should view the problem in its wholeness, and reflect that He may have imposed limitations upon His own power in the interests of the plan which He had determined to carry out.

Next, we must remember that the heart of the divine plan, so far as we can discern it, has to do with the formation of character. If pleasure were the end of life, we could imagine a universe better adapted for the securing of that end. But if life has a moral purpose, then it may well be that pain and suffering are means to that end. This, at any rate, is true, that some of the finest characters have been shaped under the discipline of suffering. Thirdly, there is the fact of sin, with the suffering which sin entails. If there were no sin, how the volume of pain would be reduced. Sin is due to man's misuse of his freedom. But if man was to be a moral creature the gift of freedom was a necessity, for morality, as we have seen, implies and

demands freedom. We cannot blame God for what is the fault of man.

Finally, we cannot envisage the whole of the problem of suffering. We cannot see into the next life. "We know in part." What seems loss on a smaller view may turn out to be gain on a larger. In ways undiscerned by us God may be, and the Christian believes that He is, overruling the course of the world, so that the final issue of events is good. These various considerations, though they do not remove our difficulties, certainly help to alleviate them, and encourage us to cling to the truth of the divine Fatherhood.

Amid all our perplexities let us hold fast to the conviction of the value of human personality in God's eyes. We are not the mere sport of wind and wave. We are spiritual beings, who have come into existence at the end of a long process of evolution which has been leading up to the production of personality. The meaning of that process, as we have seen, is to be found in the end reached by it; and the process is evacuated of meaning, if we deny the intrinsic worth of the human person. We must not allow our judgment to be clouded

by the dominance of scientific modes of thought. Science deals with generalities; with the 'laws' of Nature, that is, with the way in which the forces of Nature under similar conditions operate uniformly; with 'classes' of objects, minerals or plants or animals. Because certain groups of objects have characters in common they are put into a class and labelled with a descriptive title. The individual peculiarities of each object are forgotten; the object is treated as a specimen of a number of similar objects. But is there anything, in the world of life certainly, which is a mere specimen? Has not each living thing an individuality and worth of its own in God's eyes? Does God ever create a class; does He not always create an individual? The point is, that, as you mount up in the scale of being, individuality is more and more stamped on Nature, until it reaches its culmination in man; and with the development of individuality goes the development of the sense of value which we attach to the individual.

> Oh yet we trust that somehow good
> Will be the final goal of ill,
> To pangs of nature, sins of will,
> Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

That nothing walks with aimless feet;
  That not one life shall be destroy'd,
  Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete;

That not a worm is cloven in vain;
  That not a moth with vain desire
  Is shrivel'd in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain.[1]

"We trust"; we cannot know with certainty. If we could know there would be no room for faith. We are on probation here. Part of our discipline is that we have to live by trust, not by sight. We are called to the high adventure of a voyage over the ocean of life, where the distant haven is beyond our ken. But that ocean has been traversed by One who, speaking from its further shore, says, "Fear not." We have Christ's word for it, that we are travelling to a Father's home. In our doubts we commit ourselves to Him; in our perplexities we throw ourselves upon the revelation of God which He brought. "Jesus said therefore unto the twelve, Would ye also go away? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." (John vi. 67, 68).

1. Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, liv.

Chapter X — The Suffering of God

In all their affliction he was afflicted.—ISAIAH lxiii, 9.

Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.
—ISAIAH liii. 4.

SORROW belongs to the very nature of Love, so long, at least, as the ends which love seeks are not perfectly realized. If love reigned fully in our hearts, so that there was no sin or selfishness anywhere, perhaps there would be no sorrow, but only "joy in widest commonalty spread." But how far away we are from that ideal! Love here, as it works in human life, is blended with sorrow, because its ends are not attained. What are the ends which love seeks? It seeks the highest welfare of others; it cares for the personality of others; it would see the principle of its own life reproduced in all with whom it has relationships. The loving heart of a mother must feel sorrow if her child is wilful and disobedient and

chooses some path of sin which she knows will ruin his life. The test of the quality of the mother's love is its endurance and the range of its self-sacrifice. Is she ready to go out into the wilderness to seek the lost sheep, persisting till she finds it? Is she prepared to spare no pains to bridge again the gap which separates her from her child?[1] Love in this world can reach its goal only through sorrow and pain. The strongest thing on earth, it is also one of the most tender and delicate—

> Love, like an Alpine harebell hung with tears
> By some cold morning glacier.[2]

Now if pain of necessity enters into human love, and if human love is a reflection of the love of God, must not God feel pain? Can He be really a Father if His heart is not sympathetically moved by the sorrows and miseries of the lives of His children?

1. For a charming treatment of the connexion between love and sorrow, and of the problem of unmerited suffering seen in the light of the Cross, see *The Highway of the Cross* by J. P. S. R. Gibson—one of the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement pamphlets, published by Hodder and Stoughton, 3d. each.

2. Tennyson, *The Princess.*

In pagan thought the gods were pictured as living in a blissful calm in some high heaven, while below them on earth men toiled and fought and suffered pain. Such a view of God is intolerable to us who have received the revelation that God is love.

Our whole being revolts against it. We feel that we cannot give our loyalty to a God who is indifferent to the woes of humanity: we demand that there shall be that in God which really corresponds to the love which is the highest thing we know in ourselves, a love which takes sorrow to its heart with an ungrudging embrace.

What grounds have we for saying that God feels sorrow? There is, in the first place, the fact of sin. Human sin must mean something to God. He cannot be indifferent to it, if His purpose is a redemptive purpose; but must react against it with the whole force of His Being. Is that reaction only one of hatred or repulsion? Has it not a tenderer side? May we not say that God is *wounded* by our sinning, that our sins *hurt* His heart of love? God, we believe, is ready to forgive the

repentant sinner. But forgiveness can spring only from a heart that has been wounded. Real forgiveness costs something. It is no mechanical operation, but is the movement of one personality toward another, a movement in which love covers up an earlier hurt at the cost of self-sacrifice. Sin is something more than the violation of a moral order. It is an offence against a Person; and that Person Jesus Christ has revealed as a Father, who loves His human children and cares intensely that they should live in loyal obedience to Himself. God must experience real sorrow at our sinning. We too often think very lightly of sin, make excuses for it and treat it as a weakness which may be condoned. The true estimate of sin will be found when we set sin in relation to the character of God and His purpose for us. In a child's repentance the bitterest ingredient is the reflection that it has done something which hurts father or mother, and the sweetest that their love is ready to forgive and blot out the past. We are all children of the Father in heaven; and if His heart is one of love it cannot but be that we wound Him when we sin. And is not the strongest motive to repentance

just this, that we realize that we are hurting a love which is utterly tender towards us? Many a man in the grip of some sin has been deaf to the appeal that he should turn over a new leaf out of respect for his own manhood, or should consider the pain he is causing to his family and friends. But once it has come home to him what the love of God is, and what his sin means to the loving heart of God, his stubborness is broken down, and like the prodigal son he cries "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son." We may be sure then that there is constant sorrow in the heart of God, caused by our sinfulness and slighting of His love.

But, secondly, our strongest ground for saying that God suffers with His world lies in the Cross of Jesus Christ. We must not separate the death of Jesus from His life. The death was but the culmination of the life. His whole life was one of self-giving for men; the Cross was the supreme instance of that self-giving. In it the principle of the life came to full maturity. There on Calvary we see to what lengths the love

of God was prepared to go in the prosecution of its redemptive purpose. It stopped short at nothing. It went down into the very depths of shame and sorrow to lift a sinning world to new life. "He saved others, himself he cannot save" was the mocking taunt hurled at Jesus on the Cross by his enemies. It was just His glory that He could not save Himself. Had He done so, men would not have seen love in the perfection of its self-sacrifice. They would not have followed a leader who shrunk from the supreme ordeal. But He did not shrink, and ever since that Cross, standing up against the Judæan sky-line, has told men of a love of God, whose depths no human plummet can sound.

The wonder of the Cross; how amazing it is! When God seeks to redeem men, when the Father wants to bring home to His children the real nature of His love for them, what does he do? He comes Himself in the Person of His Son to die for them upon a Cross. He enters into the full range of their experience, undergoes the worst which life has to offer, loneliness, desertion by friends, scorn and hatred of malicious opponents, bodily suffering, mental anguish, a cruel

death. Of these far the worst was the mental anguish, the anguish of a sinless soul faced with the real significance of human sin. Here was divine love, revealing not only its own nature, but the nature of sin. Here was God wrestling with sin, exposing sin in its true character, showing what it cost to deal with it effectively. Love's method of dealing with sin is the only method by which sin can finally be abolished. To set sin in the light of God's love for the sinner, to show that love wounded to the core by sin, yet all the while seeking to reclaim the sinner, coming right down into his sinful life with a message of forgiveness and healing, is love's sure way of winning an ultimate triumph.

Centuries before it was given to an Old Testament prophet to see a vision of this way of redemption by the self-sacrifice of love. The unknown writer, whom we call Second Isaiah, writing on the eve of the return of the Jews from exile, draws a picture of the Suffering Servant who is to redeem his people. Israel had not fulfilled its vocation; it had been disloyal to God. Punishment had fallen on it. But now God

in His love, and true to His promise, was about to restore the nation again to their native land. The prophet longs to see the restored nation loyal to God, and not only walking in the light itself, but spreading that light among other nations. He sees that this can be accomplished only if the faithful few, the nucleus of the nation, are ready at all costs to be true to God. They will be laughed at by their fellows, persecuted and maltreated. This they must not mind. Only let them be loyal, and their fidelity will act as a leaven which will gradually leaven the whole lump. Sometimes the prophet gives the name 'Servant' to the whole nation; more often only to the faithful nucleus.[1]

He personifies this nucleus; we see a single figure faced with the difficult task of being the saviour of his people. In language of melting beauty and pathos he describes the Suffering Servant. "His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men . . . he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we

1. The Servant passages are xli. 8-20; xlii. 1-7, 18 ff.; xliii. 5-10; xlix. 1-9; l. 4-10; lii. 13-liii.

see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." See him at his redemptive task. Men scorn him; refuse to believe that this is the looked-for redeemer. This is one "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." suffering, perhaps for some wrong-doing, the heavy chastisement of God's hand. They insult him, but he bears it all patiently. No murmur escapes his lips; he has no reproach for his tormentors. "He was oppressed, yet he humbled himself and opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, he opened not his mouth." "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." Finally they kill him. But the hour of his defeat was the hour of his triumph. The deed was done; but then came the pause, when passion had died down, and reflection could do its work, and hard hearts were open once again to the promptings of God's Spirit. What had they gained by their deed? Him they had silenced; but his words lived on in memory, and they were

haunted by the vision of that sad face, that calm and patient sufferer. Gradually the truth dawned on them, the truth which God had all along been wanting to teach them, that this was in very truth their Redeemer. This was God's way of showing how He loved them, and wanted to help them. They see it all now, and the confession breaks from their lips, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows . . . he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

To this Old Testament picture of the method of redeeming love the New Testament adds a fresh touch, which makes the marvel all the greater. It shows us God Himself as the Suffering Servant. Not through another, not by a selected messenger, did God reveal the depths of His love for men. But He came Himself in Jesus Christ to redeem men through suffering and death. In the mind of the prophet the Servant may

have stood for the faithful nucleus of Israel; but what Christian is there, who, reading this prophecy in the light of the fulfilment it received on Calvary, will not feel that there was prediction here? There was a deeper significance in the prophet's words than he himself knew. He had no vision of Jesus Christ, but through him God was giving to the world a glimpse of that fuller revelation which was to come later. Behind the picture of the Servant, like a portrait upon which another is superimposed, we trace the outlines of a figure which was to be fully disclosed in God's own good time.

We think, then, of God as working out His purpose at the cost of infinite pain, of His love moving to its final victory through sorrow. For ourselves and our own lives the thought has a two-fold significance. In the first place it is a thought which should shame us, when we reflect that part of that sorrow is caused by ourselves. Every time we sin we increase the burden which God has to carry. We are familiar with the well-known picture of St. Sebastian, his body transfixed with arrows. How often have we sent an arrow into the divine heart!

The Greek word for sin in the New Testament signifies literally "a missing of the mark." We miss the mark; the arrow turns aside and wounds God. In *The Sorrows of Satan* Marie Corelli depicts Satan as longing to be good, but hindered by the sinning of man. Satan is kept bad by human wrong-doing. And that same wrong-doing keeps God sad. Can we go on sinning, when once we realize what our failure costs God? Is not it the basest ingratitude to turn thus against a love which only seeks to bless us, and is ready to forgive all the past? But, secondly, the thought that suffering is part of the life of God helps and consoles us when we are called on to suffer. "Beloved," says St. Peter, "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you: but insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy" (I. iv. 12, 13). The Christian links his own sufferings with the sufferings of Christ. He remembers the word, "In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome

the world" (John xvi. 33). He presses through his pain closer to the heart of God, accepts it as part of the world's burden which God shares, and with a living faith in the ultimate goodness of God is content to trust when he cannot understand. And his trust takes this form. It leads him to treat his suffering as a divine discipline. "God has a blessing for me wrapped up in this trouble. It is meant to teach me something. Through it God is calling me to be more tender, more unselfish, more reliant on His grace. I will use it as something which will purify my character and make me more Christlike. Why should I rebel against my pain, when I remember all that Christ endured?" St. Paul has told us how he prayed that God would take away from him his "thorn in the flesh." But his prayer was not granted. Instead, there was given him a new revelation of the divine presence, "And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness." He prays no more for the removal of his infirmity, but accepts it with joy as something which brings Christ close to his life. "Most gladly therefore will I

rather glory in my weaknesses that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (II. Corinthians xii. 9).

Picture some vast temple or cathedral, and at the outer door a group of men waiting in the darkness. To them comes Sorrow, the black-robed priestess, and says, "Come with me through the building. I will reveal to you life's secret; I will make clear its mystery of pain." The men enter, but some fear to commit themselves to their guide. They are terrified by the gloom, the silence, the vastness of the place, and so turn back, and go out again into the night. But others follow Sorrow; and she leads them eastward through the building to a shrine at the far end, whence beneath the closed door a ray of light issues. She opens the door, and they pass with her into the shrine. There stands One whose name is Man of Sorrows, with pierced palms and wearing a crown of thorns. He lays His right hand upon each of them, and says, "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the Living one . . . be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." In the radiance of that sanctuary the riddle is made plain, not to intellect, but to heart and will.

They win, not a speculative solution of their problem, but the revelation of a love which takes pain into its embrace. They see Jesus, and are glad.

Chapter XI *The Severity of God*

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness.—ROMANS i, 18.

And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life.—ST. MATTHEW xxv, 46.

THERE is a marked tendency to-day to neglect the severer side of Christ's teaching about God and judgment to come. A century ago the doctrine of eternal punishment, which was interpreted as everlasting punishment, was in the ascendant. Appeal was made for support of missions to the heathen, on the ground that the unconverted heathen went to hell. A change has come over our thought since then, which is certainly in part due to the following reasons. First, all theological dogmas are increasingly being brought to the bar of conscience. Dogma is being ethically criticized, and any dogma

which is felt to contradict the verdict of the moral sense is rejected. It is obviously unfair to condemn to everlasting punishment men who have never had a chance of knowing the truth as it is in Jesus; or to mete out an eternity of woe for the sins of youth, when the will is undeveloped, and the gravity of life's choices is hardly realized. Secondly, scholarship has done much to recover for us the background of Jewish thought about the future, against which Christ's utterances on judgment to come must be viewed. A large number of those utterances are quotations from Jewish apocalyptic books current at the time, and the language used is pictorial, and is not to be taken literally. Criticism has raised the question, which has seriously to be faced, whether the genuine teaching of Jesus about the future has not been coloured and heightened by those who committed the record of His life to writing. His contemporaries were accustomed to think in terms of these apocalyptic books. They were familiar with the pictures of judgment to come contained in them. May they not have attributed to Him teaching which He never gave? The effect of these considerations

has unquestionably been to mitigate in the popular mind the impression of severity which we receive when we take His words in the Gospels at their face value. Thirdly, the stress rightly laid upon the duty of the Christian to be up and doing in the service of humanity, the loud call in an age which is interested in social and economic problems to share the common burden and spend and be spent for others, have tended to weaken the sense of sin, and make men think that what they are doing for humanity is more important than what they are in themselves. Nor can it be denied that of recent years the standards of Christian morality have been increasingly called in question. Men and women ask why they should be bound by them. May they not taste life in its fullness and widen the range of their experience without let or hindrance from traditional moral conventions ? Lastly, one of the most notable features in the recent development of theology has been its emphasis on the Fatherhood of God. This is due to the recovery of the historical Jesus, Jesus as He lived and taught in Palestine, as He moved among the crowds, doing His works of mercy, and telling them of the love which

their Father in heaven had for them. Jesus the pitiful, the humane, the sympathetic, fills the canvas. We are bidden see Him trying to establish on earth the Kingdom of God, setting us an example of service and self-sacrifice, and using none of the traditional theological vocabulary about sin.

Now in trying to appreciate any system of teaching, we must, if we are to be fair to it, take the whole of it into account. Can it be denied that in the teaching of Jesus there is a terribly severe side ? Whatever allowance may have to be made for the possibility that some of His teaching about the future was coloured by those who wrote the Gospels, we cannot strike out all that He said about judgment to come. If He never said any of these things, why should His contemporaries have attributed them to Him ? Nor do all His severer sayings occur in the apocalyptic sections of the narrative. It is only a subjective criticism which has run riot that will refuse to admit that He spoke in the gravest terms about the fate of the impenitent. Consider the tremendousness of such sayings as these ; " Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven "

(Matthew x. 33). "Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew x. 28). And, though the language is pictorial and symbolical, consider the emphatic gravity of the terms used to describe the exclusion of the impenitent from the kingdom—"the unquenchable fire" (Mark ix. 44); "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark ix. 48); "eternal punishment" (Matthew xxv. 46); "this place of torment" (Luke xvi. 28). Jesus plainly contemplated the shutting out of the wicked from the Kingdom of God. He spoke of the possibility of sinning "an eternal sin" (Mark iii. 29), and asked, "what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?" (Matthew xvi. 26).

It is certain that He spoke of judgment to come, and said that judgment would be according to character. By the use which men made of their lives would they be judged, by what they said and did, or failed to do, by the nature of their response to Christ's own appeal to their consciences.[1]

Jesus said very little to satisfy our natural

1. Cf. Matthew vii. 21-23; xii. 36, 37; xxv. 31-46; x. 32, 33.

curiosity about the next life: His teaching on that subject is marked by a great reserve. But two things He made plain; first that man lived on beyond the grave; secondly, that this life was a period of probation, and that according to our use of this life, so would be our destiny in the next. It is true that He did not use much of our traditional language about sin, but no one saw the nature of sin with clearer eyes. His whole purpose was to redeem men from the power of sin, to reveal to them that sin was a violation of their sonship to the Father, to show them a love of God which was seeking them out, so that it might draw them into a heavenly fellowship. Jesus in His teaching placed the emphasis upon character, upon personality with its capacity for moral goodness. Man was of such value in God's eyes just because he could rise to heights of moral achievement, because he was capable of living a life of sonship with God.

Do not our own spiritual intuitions confirm the verdict that a moral judgment awaits us? Here in this life we punish the criminal, and feel that wrong-doing deserves punishment. Is there to be no punishment in the next life? What meaning have our

moral ideals and our struggles after goodness, if in the final issue ethical distinctions are to be obliterated ? The ethical argument for immortality has always been a strong argument. We feel, not only that the moral values of character have permanent worth ; but also that justice requires that in the next life the good and the bad shall receive different treatment. A bad life here does not always meet with what we feel to be its deserts, and we call in the future to redress the balance. If the source of our moral ideals is a God who in Himself eternally realizes these ideals and cares supremely for character, then some form of judgment to come is the only reasonable sequel to our probation here.

What will be the nature of the judgment ? We cannot take literally the pictorial language in which the judgment is described. The great white throne, the opened books, the weeping and gnashing of teeth, are imagery derived from current apocalyptic literature, or experience of human modes of judgment and grief. No material flames will scorch the unrepentant sinner. It will be a spiritual judgment, spiritually administered. Here we may ask whether any

punishment can be worse than that of remorse? To awake, when it is too late, to a realization of one's folly; to have brought home to one in a world where no blurring of moral issues is possible one's true spiritual condition; and then to be left alone with one's bare self, haunted by the visions of what might have been, is surely to be where "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

The point, however, to be emphasized is this, that our final state, whether of weal or woe, can be nothing but the necessary completion of our growth here. There is nothing capricious or arbitrary about God's judgment in the future. It will merely be the clear register of our past life. There tendencies which have been slowly taking shape here will come to maturity. The man of to-morrow is being made by the choices of the man of to-day. There is continuity in the life of character. The present grows out of the past, and the past gives birth to the future. No mechanical necessity governs the development. Character is made by our free choices, and in virtue of our freedom we can always make a new start and begin to reverse our line of movement.

But the finally completed character will be the exact expression of the sum total of all the choices by which the character was gradually shaped. Hence it is profoundly true to say that every day we are passing judgment on ourselves, and making our own heaven or hell. In St. John's Gospel apocalyptic imagery is for the most part absent. The writer pictures judgment, not so much as a final catastrophe, but rather as a continuous process moving to its end. "He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. For every one that doeth ill hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God" (iii. 18-21). In this passage judgment is regarded as revelation, as the unfolding of character in the light of the truth brought by Jesus. And the revelation is going on

day by day. A man's daily choices make plain his character. The process is continuous. When the end comes the man will have made his own destiny. You have only to picture him brought into God's presence, brought, that is, into such a clear spiritual light that no excuses and no disguises are possible, to see that he inevitably becomes his own judge and condemns himself. His conscience becomes his accuser. The man's inmost self is revealed. Made for good, he has identified himself with evil; made for God, he has chosen self. He is unfit for the spiritual surroundings in which he finds himself. He could not be happy in heaven, because his nature is not heavenly. This is his punishment; he inflicts it on himself by his own act.

Yet it is true to speak of it as God's punishment of him, because the moral order under which we live is of divine appointment, and it is God who has ordained the law that what a man sows that shall he reap. A human father may punish his child in one of two ways. He may either punish him by personal intervention, as the schoolmaster uses the rod on a pupil or sets him an imposition. Or he may have the child

to learn by bitter experience that his wrong-doing carries with it inevitable consequences, such as the grieving of the father's heart, the disturbing of the normal happy relationships of family life, and the like. God's method of punishment can hardly be thought of as belonging to the type of personal intervention. God is not a magnified man. He acts through the moral order and through the working of man's nature. But since sin is more than the violation of the moral order, since it is an offence against a Personal Spirit of Holy Love ("against thee, thee only, have I sinned"), the consequences which follow upon sin may rightly be regarded as bearing on them a personal imprint. They are God reacting as a Personal Being against human transgression.

We are considering the severity of love. It is because the nature of the divine love is misunderstood that men tend to lose sight of its severer elements. Love as a sentiment lacks robustness; love as an emotion may be a weak and vapid thing, even though the passion in it be strong, if it is not tempered with respect for the personality of the one who is loved. This kind of love may very easily allow the moral judgment to

be obscured. It may overlook the wrong-doing, and forgive on easy terms, just because it does not consider the true welfare of the offender, who requires the discipline of punishment for the formation of stable character. A parent may do real harm to a child by a weak refusal to punish it. When God's love is spoken of in the Bible it always carries with it a reference both to the character of God, and to the purpose of God for men. God's love is a holy love; God's character is one of perfect moral goodness; and His purpose for man is to form in man a character of the same kind as that which belongs to Himself. Such a love must be severe. God would be contradicting His own nature, if punishment did not follow sin. His purpose for man would be defeated, if there were no principle of moral judgment in His governance of the world. But it is we who call out into operation the severity latent in God's love. At the heart of that love lies the readiness to forgive us, the desire to take us into fellowship with itself. God comes more than half way to meet us in our repentance; but if we are not ready to repent, how can He come to meet us? The thing is morally

impossible. His love must become severity.

It is no part of our purpose to discuss here at any length the many problems connected with the future destiny of the wicked. We are faced with difficulties which we have no adequate means of solving. Some have held that at the long last all men will be saved; that the unrepentant here, will hereafter, through much remorse and suffering and bitter spiritual discipline, climb gradually back to a state of reconciliation with God. Thus, and then only, they maintain, can God finally be "all in all," and the triumph of goodness be complete.[1]

Others hold a belief in Conditional Immortality. Only those survive who are qualified to survive, who have the necessary spiritual survival value. Immortality, in other words, is not man's inherent birthright,

1. The thought of God as the perfection of Love, and the thought of a hell from which there is no hope of escape, cannot logically be held together. Nor is it easy to think of a Father destroying His child. Dr. Murray's, *The Goodness and The Severity of God* (Student Christian Movement), should be carefully studied. The author insists that the traditional teaching about eternal punishment needs revision, and that the doctrine of the Bible on this matter has been misunderstood. He puts forward a well-reasoned plea for his belief that ultimately all men will be saved, and God's love win its complete victory.

but has to be won by moral effort. What of the wicked, on this theory? Either they do not survive, in which case they suffer no punishment; or they survive sufficiently long to suffer punishment, and then are either destroyed by God, or destroy themselves by a process of spiritual decay, which disintegrates and ultimately dissolves the personality. To this view the following objections are raised. First, what warrant have we for dividing humanity into two classes? Are not all men fundamentally the same in constitution, and do not all possess the capacity for spiritual development? Is it not more reasonable to suppose that those who are undeveloped and spiritually immature here will have further opportunities for growth in the next life? Secondly, would God, if He is flawless love, punish a sinner for a season, only to destroy him at the end? Such punishment is in no sense remedial, and to reform the wrong-doer is the main object of human punishment. To which it may be retorted that there may be limits to the possibility of amendment, that evil may become so engrained in a character that any remedial treatment is useless.

Hence punishment can here only take a retributive form; and that it is proof of God's mercy that the personality is finally allowed to perish rather than endure an eternity of woe.

What "eternal" punishment means we do not know. The word translated by "eternal" is "æonian." The rewards and penalties spoken of relate to the coming æon or epoch, which was to usher in the final triumph of Christ, the Messiah.

We have no ground for interpreting eternal as meaning "endless." Possibly the word has no time reference at all, but refers to a spiritual condition, is qualitative rather than quantitative. Nor have we any grounds for asserting that in all cases a man's final destiny is fixed at death. It may be so with some; with others we should more naturally expect a period of further probation and growth. We have moved away from the thought of a static heaven. Heaven must be a scene of development. If we think of it as a ladder, we may expect to find the different rungs of the ladder occupied by different groups of people. There must be continuity between this life and the next. There must

be degrees of goodness there as well as here.

We may speculate without limit; we cannot know the certainty of these things. But if we take the teaching of Jesus as a whole, two principles stand out clearly. There is a continuance of personal life after death; and there is a judgment to come, a judgment by character. Jesus plainly taught that upon this world's choices depend issues which reach out far beyond this life; and that man is the maker of his destiny.

The love of God surrounds us, and calls to us to respond to its appeal. Sin is the refusal to respond, and sin persisted in must alienate the sinner from God.

The final result of such persistence in sin can only be complete separation from God with all the penal consequences which such separation involves.

The love of God, how strong and tender it is! How patient God has been with us in our folly and sinning! Time and again have we thwarted that love, but it is still there, waiting for us to repent, ready to welcome us back again. Let us bring our lives out into the sunlight of that love, see ourselves as we are, and as we may by God's help

become, and, if we have wandered from Him, go back to the Father as His children who want to do better, and come to Him because they know that He loves them.

Chapter XII *The Personality of God*

There is no God else beside me; a just God and a saviour; there is none beside me.—ISAIAH xlv. 21.

I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.—ISAIAH xliii. 15.

ARE we right in speaking of God as a Person? When we do so, what do we mean by the word? The Bible throughout uses personal terms of God, and conceives of religion as involving personal relationships between man and God. In the Old Testament God is pictured as a Supreme Person, and all His attributes are such as belong to a being with mind and will and emotion. He is called Creator, Ruler, King, Judge, Father. The last of these titles was selected by Jesus as His name for God, and it is a title charged with personal associations. Even in those forms of religion where God is not regarded as personal, the theory of the religion is contradicted by the practice of the worshipper

who, if he prays at all, prays as if to a person; or approaches the Supreme Being through subordinate deities who are regarded as His personal manifestations. Prayer addressed to a blind force is meaningless; and how can one worship an unconscious tendency or energy? It is natural, then, for man to think of God in personal terms.

Obviously, however, He is not a Person like ourselves. We have bodies; God has no body. We are limited in many directions; He is not subject to those limitations. Whatever His personality may be, it transcends ours immeasurably. Some would say that, because He is so infinitely above us, we cannot describe Him as personal; but if so, that really means that we cannot describe Him at all. For if we cannot use of Him the highest conception which we possess, we have no other terms in which to characterize Him, because, clearly, lower conceptions are still more inadequate. To speak of God as a force or an animal, instead of calling Him a Person, is repellent to our religious nature. The charge of anthropomorphism, of making God in the likeness of man, is often brought against religion. The charge has point, if we use crude

conceptions of God. God, we read in Genesis, "smelled the sweet savour" of Noah's sacrifice. An expression like that cannot be taken literally; and there are many passages, particularly in the earlier narratives of the Old Testament, which attribute human passions and human modes of thought and action to God, which we cannot accept as giving a true account of the divine nature. But if we are to describe Him at all we must use human speech about Him, for we have no other.

Very briefly let us consider what valid reasons we have for speaking of God in terms of personality. (*a*) As we have seen, we cannot help interpreting the course of evolution in terms of purpose. We judge that a plan is being gradually worked out. One stage of the development prepares the way for the next; and each stage helps to reveal more clearly the meaning of the whole, which unfolds its fullest significance in the end finally reached by the process. Can we say that the nature of the purpose which is manifested indicates that the Power behind the universe is personal? Surely we can; we can affirm that God is interested in the production of

human personalities, for the whole process seems to converge upon that end. Now whatever emerges in the process must have its ground in the source from which the process flows. God cannot, therefore, be less than personal. There must be that in Him which has real kinship with personality in ourselves. You cannot produce something out of nothing, and you cannot extract a person from an impersonal source. The personality of God is no doubt something far higher and richer than our own; but, however much He transcends us, there must be that in Him which really corresponds with what is highest in ourselves. (*b*) Secondly, the distinguishing feature of our life as persons is to be found in our capacity to appreciate values. We pass judgments of value, and say "this is good, or true, or beautiful. This has worth. It is an end in itself; we can rest in it, and find satisfaction in it." But the values which at any given moment we appreciate do not exhaust our capacity for appreciating. In other words, and this is particularly true of the moral life, there is always a beyond, a stage of possible higher attainment. Ideals haunt us and beckon us to pursue them. "Not

that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on." It is always possible to be better than we are. The artist sees a rarer beauty than the beauty which he embodies in his picture. The thinker never grasps more than a part of the truth which he pursues. Now, as we ponder on the meaning of the fact that we appreciate values and reach out after ideals, are we not forced to the conclusion that somewhere at the heart of reality truth, beauty and goodness exist in their perfection? They are part of the nature of ultimate reality; reality includes them, and it is only because they are *there* that they reveal their presence *here*.

In other words, they are not mere ideals, unsubstantial creations of our own imaginations, but have real existence in an eternal world. But what kind of existence have they? We know them here only as personal values. Moral goodness is the quality of a person; beauty needs a human perception for its appreciation; truth has meaning only for a thinker with a mind. Take away the personal reference from these ideals, and then their meaning is gone. We find it impossible to conceive of them except in

connexion with persons who appreciate and follow them. Must we not therefore conclude that there is personality in God, who is the ultimate reality whence proceeds our personal life with its judgments of value? (*c*) Creative activity characterizes the Power behind the universe. Evolution is something more than a succession of changes; it is a process in which new powers and qualities come into being, in which there is enrichment of the process. We know not the secret of life, but a living thing is markedly different from a dead one. It possesses the power of growth, converts into its own substance material which it absorbs from its environment, reproduces its kind, adapts itself to its surroundings, and has a unity which is closer than the unity possessed by any machine. All its parts are parts of one whole, and if "one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it." The highest form of life which we know is a person. A person is creative, and uses matter for the expression of his purposes. He knows himself to be possessed of freedom, in virtue of which he has a greater power of adaptability than any other living organism. He is also a self-conscious being who can

say "I am I." Here the unity is of a peculiarly close kind. A person refers all his experiences to one centre, claims them as his own, and in his best moments seeks to make all his life the expression of some dominating purpose, in the fulfilment of which he "finds himself." We look out upon the world of life, and we see its marvellous richness. Wherever life can obtain a foothold, there it appears. The life energy pours itself into a myriad channels, and constantly embodies itself in new forms. Some vast creative activity is perpetually at work. Is not Person the best word with which to describe this activity? As Dr. Matthews puts it:—"The most obvious fact is that being a person is the highest and most complete and fullest way of being alive with which we are acquainted. Persons come at the top of an ascending scale which reaches down to the worm and the amœba. To say that God is personal, then, is to say that He is alive . . . If we believe in God at all we still have to choose, if we may use the expression, between a dead God and a living one. When I affirm that God is personal I am taking my stand on the side of life; I assert that the universe is in its

core and essence alive."[1] There is a Living God who pours the wealth of His life into a living universe. We describe Him by the highest terms which we possess. We call Him a Person, because a person is the highest form of existence which we know.

The arguments for the existence of a Personal God are cumulative. They may be summarized in some such way as the following. Only a Personal God can meet the deepest needs of our moral and spiritual nature. As persons, struggling to realize ideals of moral goodness, longing to be at peace with God and to enjoy fellowship with Him, we feel that nothing short of a Supreme Person can satisfy us. Only in One who is the perfection of personality can our imperfect personalities, which strive to overcome their own defects, find the goal of their desire. "The human heart is restless until it find rest in Thee." This demand for a Personal God is more than a wish that He may exist. It is a demand of our whole nature

1. From *Is God a Person?* one of the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement pamphlets (Hodder and Stoughton). This pamphlet should be read by all who desire to have a lucid and simple statement of the reasons why personality may be attributed to God.

based upon a passionate conviction. And the conviction can, at any rate in large part, justify itself at the bar of reason. Difficulties will always remain; there will always be the venture of faith. But the faith is essentially a reasonable faith, which can be defended by argument.

Religion will continue to speak of God as a Person, just as Jesus spoke of Him as the Father. Many, however, urge that this form of expression should be avoided, because it tends to make us think of God as a magnified man. The only personality which we know is our own, and if we call God a Person, we inevitably incline to transfer to Him our limitations. They would prefer to say that there is personality in God, rather than that He is a Person. What really matters is that we shall be assured that God is not less than personal; that when we pray we are praying to One who hears and sympathizes; that there is that in God which beats in harmony with the deepest pulses of our spiritual being; that when we speak of Him as Mind and Will we are describing something in His nature which really corresponds with mind and will in ourselves; that when we call

Him Love, we are not using a term which has no meaning for the divine experience, but that there really is in Him an attitude toward ourselves which has kinship with our movements of love toward our fellow-men. Christianity itself, after all, reminds us that the Personality of God is not to be measured by the narrow limits of our own. The doctrine of the Trinity is a protest against limiting our conception of God. We can frame no clear picture of the interior life of Deity; but "Three in One" speaks of a Being who is supra-personal, who possesses personality in a mode which passes altogether outside our ken. And we do well to remember that when the theologians spoke of a Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Godhead, they were not using the word 'Person' quite in the sense in which we use it in ordinary speech. Many Christians are really tritheists, and believe in three Gods, because they take the word 'Person' as meaning the separate individuality which we associate with human beings.

Do we, however, really know what our own personality is? In a rough way we do. We assign certain features to personality, such

as self-consciousness, memory, conscious volitional activity, the capacity to distinguish right and wrong, and so forth. But when we try to define personality in any exact manner we find ourselves in the face of many puzzles. When does a human life begin to be personal? Who can say? Is separate individuality necessarily the criterion of personality? Are we not meant to overcome our separateness, and by growing in love grow into vital union with others? Personality is a developing thing; who can tell what it may become? "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be" (I. John iii. 2).

If we are thus ignorant about our own personal life, how much more ignorant must we be of God's life? We have to keep our thought of God fluid; not in the sense that we cannot say anything with precision about Him, but in the sense that we must avoid imposing upon Him our finite limitations. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah lv. 9). We have to bow in humble reverence before the mystery of God's Being.

But let us remember the original meaning of the word "mystery." It signified something, not entirely hidden, but half-concealed and half-revealed. We cannot gaze into the sun with naked eye; but its light makes plain to us the objects around us and touches the face of the earth with beauty. So it is with God. Much in Him is hidden from us because His radiance is too bright for mortal vision; but much is revealed. Our path runs through light toward a fuller light. It is for us to walk as children of the light.

We are living in days of difficulty and perplexity. On every hand traditional beliefs are being criticized. Fresh knowledge is pouring in upon us faster than we can assimilate it. Men's minds are in confusion about many things, and not least about the nature of God. This unrest is nothing new; it is a necessary accompaniment of an age of transition, when the habits of thought and life of one epoch are giving place to those of another. But religious faith is apt to be sorely tried in such a period of uncertainty. Whenever such trial comes, let us do three things. First, let us throw ourselves for support upon the broad, simple facts of

our life as spiritual beings. These stand firm, like rocks beneath the swirl of the waters. We are inheritors of "a kingdom that cannot be shaken," a kingdom where moral goodness proclaims its inherent worth, and man is conscious of the presence of ideals and knows with intuitive certainty that he ought to pursue them, and is free to do so; where his mind, surveying the long past from which he has emerged, sees spiritual purpose written large across it; in which stands a Figure, Jesus Christ, proclaiming a message which goes to the hearts of men and meets their deepest needs. Spiritual facts are as much facts as material ones; and when we give them their due weight in our attempt to understand life's meaning, our faith in God will recover its tone.

Secondly, let us affirm our citizenship in this kingdom by trying to live out our creed. God reveals Himself to those who surrender themselves to Him and seek to do His will. The Living God manifests Himself through the fullness and wholeness of life. He makes His appeal, not only to our intellects, but to our wills and emotions as well. The whole man is concerned with religion. If we are

not trying to live in the power of the highest, we shall quickly come to doubt the reality of the highest.

Lastly, let us remember the fellowship of faith. The doubts which come to us come also to others. If they rise above them, we may take courage from their victory. We did not make the spiritual kingdom in which we find ourselves; we have inherited it. A tradition is behind us; we share in it. Christain faith has a long history; Christian experience stretches across the centuries. Each one has to fight down his own doubts. If we begin, as we do, by believing in God on the witness of another, we must go on to verify that witness for ourselves. Are we not encouraged to do so by the fact that so many have gone before us —and among them some of the very best of the race—to whom the Living God, Personal and Loving, was the greatest reality of their lives? When we have made it our own, it is ours to hand on what we have received, not as a dead tradition, incapable of any modification or re-formulation, but as a core of living truth with power to help a struggling, sinful world to higher things.

And this it is that links together as one
The sad continual companies of men ;
Not that the old Earth stands, and Ararat
Endureth, and Euphrates till to-day
Remembers where God walked beside the
stream ;
Nay rather that souls weary and hearts afire
Have everywhere besought him, everywhere
Have found and found him not ; and age
to age,
Though all else pass and fail, delivereth
At least the great tradition of their God. [1]

1. F. W. H. Myers, *Saint John the Baptist.*

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